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A Complete Novelette

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By William R. and Louis Duryea Lighton 159

An engrossing story of the Arkansas lumber industry—and of a group of men and women whose acquaintance you'll find most rewarding.

Sixteen Spirited Short Stories

From a Frontiersman's Diary By Edison Marshall 1

"The Last Command" is the first of a remarkable group of stories dealing with strong men and beasts in the far Northwest.

Adventures in Vaudevillainy By I. K. Friedman 10

Art Furber takes a vaudeville company on the road; his letters bring terror to his employers—and much joy to you.

The Spur By Harold Cary 20

He lost his job, but he found it again—and with it something well worth while: a strong story of business life.

Pure Business By H. Bedford-Jones 30

Two white men alone in a remote Chinese desert: from this encounter develops a situation of most interesting consequences.

Splitting Even with Mr. Tutt By Holman Day 37

Mr. Day is at his joyous best in this rollicking chronicle of a rebellious sea-cook and his wild, wild career.

The Actor-Man By Albert Payson Terhune 49

An amusing story of one of mankind's quaintest activities—amateur theatricals—by a masterly writer about the humorous side of life.

A Selling Slump By Elmer E. Ferris 57

A matter of cheesy salesmanship in more ways than one—an engaging story with a lot of sound sense in it.

Bennington's Bath By George Allan England 63

Funny? That's hardly the word to describe this story. It's a merry riot from start to finish, with a laugh in every line.

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MAGAZINE

JULY
1919

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor.

HEADINGS: Drawn by QUIN HALL

Exploits of an Honest Grafter

By William O. Grenolds 71

"Framing It for Grassville" reveals "Honest John, the circus fixer," in one of his typically astute schemes.

Saturday Night Fever

By Gladys E. Johnson 78

There's a certain freedom in the air on Saturday nights that's apt to send a young fellow adventuring; thereby hangs this interesting tale.

George's Atavism

By Chester T. Crowell 87

George was a gentle fellow—too all-fired gentle, perhaps; yet he came from Texas; and so there's a good story to tell about him.

Leatherneck Tales

By Barney Furey 118

The story of a gallant young man of the U. S. M. C. who in curious fashion went back to Belleau Wood.

Three Thousand Dollars

By J. E. Hasty 125

He was just a crook, but he wouldn't send the crooked mayor to prison—he was afraid the C. M. might corrupt the convicts by teaching 'em politics.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

By Clarence Herbert New 131

"Briton and Bolshevik" describes a dramatic situation in England brought about by anarchistic plottings.

The Laugh of the Camp Robber

By Clem Yore 144

A wild Western election wherein the women take a hand—with the result that things became even wilder and more Western.

Arms and the Woman

By B. O. Frederick 150

This thoroughly worth-while story is concerned with an army surgeon and a girl and an unusual state of affairs.

A Thrilling Serial

Oh, You Tex!

By William MacLeod Raine 92

The author of "The Yukon Trail" and "A Man Four-Square" is at his best in this virile, quick-moving story of the cow-country.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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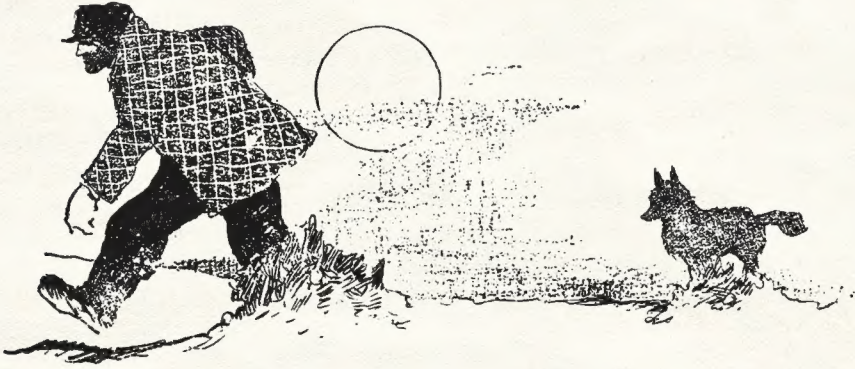
July

1919

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

Vol. XXIX

No. 3



From a Frontiersman's Diary

I—The Last Command

by Edison Marshall

It lay just outside a cabin of logs, the little heap of white that had been a man; and as we looked at it, a wolf yelled a derisive laugh from the twilight of the hill.

—From a Frontiersman's Diary.

ALL the forest people in the Lake region were aware of Graycoat's death before ever her slayer made the round of his traps. They told one another in the secret ways of the wilderness, which no man will ever completely understand. As a whole, they were glad; for Graycoat had been a remorseless and savage hunter. The old buck on the ledge peered down at her through his nearsighted eyes, snorted once in fear,—a fear that was natural as feeding in the moonlight or mating in the spring,—then raced away with the assurance that his many sons had a much better chance of growing to maturity. A flock of mallard beating down the wind dipped out of their aerial track at the sight of the gray blotch on the shore; their wise leader peered down with a bright eye; and all of them seemed to know that Graycoat was no longer to be feared. But the buzzard, waiting with ineffable patience on the limb of a dead pine, was most interested of all.

Old Matthew Hicks had been growing blind and feeble; so he did not make the

long round of his trap-line every day. The winters had been too many and too cold; his old joints were stiff and lame. It was not so easy to propel a boat across old Lake-of-the-Woods as once it had been. The expanse of snow in winter, a white infinity that few men are hardy enough to love, had almost wrecked his eyes. So it came about that Graycoat had lain stiff and cold in the trap for nearly forty-eight hours before Matthew found him.

It was just after dawn when the trapper came. The whole Lake region was blanketed in snow. There is no more beautiful place in the world than those rolling hills that mass about Mount MacLaughlin; and this morning they were in their glory. The limbs of the trees were bent low with a white load. The vista of the lakes was infinitely pure and dazzling white with their ice-sweeps brushed with snow. There are many lakes in these remote Oregon wilds. Fish Lake, a place where the great trout were ever hungry, was a white jewel just beyond; and every hour the waterfowl passed back and forth

between. The mysterious Crater Lake, on which no Indian must ever rest his eyes, lay somewhere in the woods behind. Farther away lay such strange and remote lakes as Buck and Aspen and Round.

The woods are always silent, even in midsummer when the brush is dry as tinder. Even when the footfall of a stalking hunter cracks like a match, they are the most silent places in the world. But now, when all the forest tracks were lost in snow, they made a man feel as if he had lost the power of hearing. Even the dying wolf had not broken this silence. She had something of the pride and honor that is the property of all the larger forest creatures, a creed that forbids such useless things as howling in the face of death. The fangs of the trap had seized her in the throat, and for five long hours her lifeblood ebbed before death ended her suffering.

BUT the buzzard in the pine was to be defeated after all. His sharp ears heard the *plop-plop* of Matthew's snowshoes on the lake margin; and he spread his evil wings and flew away. The mild ducks heard it too. They darted up from their tule thickets.

The man did not even exclaim when he saw the body of the wolf. He was a trapper, not a wolf-catcher. Yet the hide brought a thirty-dollar bounty, and Graycoat was a splendid example of the great, gaunt timber-wolf which is the largest of the American wolves. And then a quality in the wolf's breast made him suddenly start.

"She's got whelps not yet weaned!" he exclaimed.

It was true. Somewhere a litter of cubs were waiting milk and warmth that would never come. There was a bounty for wolf-cubs too. He soberly skinned the beast, wondering if it would be possible to trace them to the lair. Then, with skill learned in a lifetime in the woods, he began to back-track on Graycoat's trail.

Far at the end of the lake, a good mile from the trap, he found the lair. Evidently Graycoat had walked into its steel grasp immediately on leaving her cavern. And far in the dark end of a great fissure in the rocks he found the litter. There were five little ratlike creatures lying close together, and at first he thought that all of them were dead.

The fact did not surprise him. He knew

enough of the stern ways of the wild that death was the most common thing that could happen to man or beast. It was all about. It was in the frail ice of the lakes, in the deep snows that knew no mercy, in the rolling of a boulder on the slope, or the cold that dropped like a curse on hill and valley. He had learned not to be surprised at death. The forest had instilled in him a knowledge that to most plainsmen is simply a remote realization not worth bothering about—the absolute inevitability of death. He had known that the wolf had lain long hours in the trap, and that her cubs would be without food or warmth.

He was more surprised when he saw one of them move. He peered closer—and yes, life still lingered in the largest of the litter. It twitched its ears a little, and whined. It was not over two weeks old, and still blind; yet it had enough vitality to linger through the terrible, remorseless cold of the mountain nights. He picked it up, intending to kill it with a blow against the bare rock wall of the cavern. Then he paused.

He was a lonely man, and even his dog had recently fallen victim to the timber-wolves. There was no one to share his bleak and lonely cabin. The cub had unusual vitality; it was more than half as large again as the others of the litter. Perhaps it could be kept alive and made a pet. With that in mind, he dropped it into his pocket.

LIFE is too hard in the mountains for such joyous things as humor and wit. The men grow stern and severe, as if the rocks they climb and the winters they endure instill their bitter qualities into them. Yet old Matthew Hicks came very near to smiling when he christened the whining, blind little wolf-cub. He named him Fenris, after the terrible wolf of Norse legend.

It was a good joke when Fenris was a little ratlike thing that had to be fed with a spoon. But it was not so good when he had his growth. Many were the lessons that he learned in his first year. The first meat that he had was the skinned bodies of the fur-animals that Matthew trapped, but he did not have to be taught the taste of meat and the smell of blood. He knew both by instinct. He learned a thousand secrets of mountain and glen, gorge and cliff, that man once knew but will never

find out again. He learned to follow at Matthew's heels like a dog, but through it all he remained distressingly a wolf.

It takes more than one generation to change a wolf into a dog. The close air of the cabin and the warmth of the fire seemed always strange to him. When the mysterious night came down over the mountains, a hundred wild voices would call to him, and a thousand familiar smells would make the hair stand stiff on his neck. After the first few months of his puppyhood he could no longer endure to sleep indoors.

In the daytime, however, he was as faithful a companion as any man could wish. He played and romped with Matthew by the hour; and before winter had come again, he had learned he must play lightly. The infirm old man could not stand against his rushes. He followed him on the round of his traps; and he learned to retrieve a fallen grouse or duck. He learned to watch for the quick upward jerk of his master's gun; and he would spring as a snake strikes, almost too fast for sight, when he saw Matthew's finger press back upon the trigger.

The two would hunt together; and never was there such sport as the climb up the ridges in the dawn, the hushed wait on the deer-trails, the wild excitement when his keen nose sensed the buck's approach, and finally the spring and the maddening smell of blood. They would chase the bear to his cavern, and shoot the tawny cougar spread out in grace on the limb of a pine. And Fenris' strength grew upon him until it seemed to him that his hide would rip apart.

But all this is natural in a wolf. All of the great, gaunt creatures that rage the lake region are strong beyond the power of man to measure. All of them are maddened by the smells of the night, and all of them utter remembered songs to the moon. But Fenris differed from his breed in the surpassing degree of his intelligence.

It is known that creatures abiding with men begin to partake a little of his sagacity. The horse and dog, for instance, are the most intelligent creatures in the animal kingdom. The wolf and fox have all the potentialities for mental development that a dog has; and besides, they acquire the subtle, terrible cunning of the wild creatures. Necessity teaches them how to plan and carry out complicated pursuits and attacks that have always been quite discon-

certing to those humans who ascribe the power of reason to man alone. Fenris in his daily contact with Matthew had all the advantages for mental training of a dog; and besides, he had the inscrutable cunning of a wolf. In his night wanderings he learned the stern lessons that only necessity can teach: the craft of stalking, the sudden lightning rush and onslaught.

He was lean and gaunt like any wolf; and his contact with man had strengthened rather than weakened him. No matter how ably the wolf-pack hunts, it is rare that they kill meat enough to satisfy their ever-changing tissue. It was not so with Fenris. He hunted as he liked, and killed as he liked. And when he did not have enough, Matthew never stinted him from the store of meat in the cabin. Deer were to be obtained simply by climbing the ridge; and Matthew thought nothing of giving him a whole quarter for his meal.

THE years came and passed, and ever Fenris ranged farther. He knew the entire Lake region, heart and soul. He knew the best places to creep upon a flock of water-fowl, feeding at the margin of the lakes. He knew the range of the half-wild cattle, the sections that must be avoided for fear of men with guns, the nesting-place of grouse and the thickets where the bucks slept in the heat of the day. Farther and farther he roamed, and sometimes whole weeks passed before he would return to the cabin. At such times he would suddenly remember Matthew, the human smell and the fire leaping in the grate, and he would return on the tireless lope that would run down any deer than ranged the mountains.

Spring and summer and winter—Fenris knew the secrets of each. And one night he met the wolf-pack. They eyed him strangely and warily. He had the human smell upon him. Then their leader rushed him.

Fenris knew that mode of attack. He sprang aside, just in time, and sent home a savage bite in the other's shoulder. And then while the wolves ranged about them, a gaunt and silent company, he fought for the right to hunt with the pack—and won.

BUT there came a time, when Fenris was at the crown of his strength and cunning, that his entire relation with Matthew Hicks was changed. He had been hunting on the hills; and the far-off

sight of a human being reminded him of his gray-haired foster-father. He came loping down through the twilight, ridge after ridge streaming beneath him; and he did not even pause to chase a deer that sprang from his path.

But there was no light burning in the window. This was a strange thing. He had always looked for the light first, on his descent from the hills. Some voice within him, some rudimentary mental process, told him that a change had come in his old home.

Old Matthew was lying on his bed, uttering a prayer that is the very opposite to the creed of the forest. He was praying for speedy death. He looked old and weak and strange; and he seemed scarcely to notice the great, gaunt wolf that bounded at his bedside. He had no need of the light now. He was blind. The eyes that had troubled him so long had winged out at last. And he was facing an ugly death by starvation.

The wolf barked at his bedside, and tried to fondle the wasted hand on the coverlet. Then the man seemed to notice him.

"It's good-by this time, old Fenris," he said. "It's good-by, old wolf. I can't see no more. I can't see to hunt my meat."

He reached a hand along the wolf's muscular sides; and the animal whimpered eagerly. "You aint been starvin'," he said. "You're well fed, Fenris. And I guess you're well named after all, you big gaunt devil!"

All at once he sat upright. In the remote spaces of his mind a thought was brightening and taking shape. Then he sprang to his feet.

"It's worth a trial!" he exclaimed. "Blast your wicked old soul, you'd always use to chase 'em if I'd let you. Why can't I let you do my huntin' for me, now I can't see!"

He did not wait for morning. Morning meant nothing to his blasted eyes; and he knew that the dark needs must be deep indeed that Fenris could not see. He ate a little of his remaining store of food to give him strength. Then he got a piece of rope, and made a collar and short thong for the wolf. Then they started together out into the darkness.

IT was a strange pair that wandered out on the lake margin. The moonlight showed them like two things of witchcraft—an old

man, bent and feeble, blind as a mole; and such a savage guide as the moon seldom has looked down upon before. Matthew chuckled as he remembered the first time that the wolf and he had come along the lake. On that occasion Fenris had been blind instead of himself.

The wolf walked slowly, but the man had really little need of the wolf's eyes. He knew the way. In his long years he had learned the region rim to rim. Besides, he was a mountaineer with a mountaineer's sixth sense in traversing mountain-trails.

The wolf seemed hardly to understand at first. But now that they were in the moonlight together, and the hunting smells were a maddening breath on every wind, he began to feel the age-old lust of the chase. They were hunting together—that was it. Only on this occasion his master did not carry a gun. They were mounting the ridges to the deer-trails. He was shaking with eagerness.

They were walking up-wind with inconceivable silence; and all at once the wolf crouched down. The man stretched a hand, and waited till the creature's muscles grew taut as tension wires. Always, in their previous hunts, he had thus crouched at the proximity of game. He watched the man's face for the customary signal.

Matthew motioned with his arm, and whispered. That was enough. The creature understood. He sprang like a shell driven from a cannon, and the man heard the light beat of his feet in the brush. The echo was a half-strangled death-cry of a deer.

"Dead bird!" the man called sharply—as he had always done. He heard the wolf yelp in reply, and the dry crack of the brush as the beast tugged at his prey in an effort to retrieve. Cheering wildly, the old man went to meet the wolf; and for a moment the blind man and the blood-mad wolf romped like two crazy things in the moonlight.

Then he went to work and cut away the two hind quarters. He waited while the wolf ate his fill of what remained. And together, such companions as only creatures who shed blood together can ever be, they wandered down the long slope to the cabin.

NOT until spring came again did they hear from their hunting. The story of the strange pair had got abroad; and

once in the twilight a visitor came to Matthew's cabin.

The wolf seemed absent when he came. The man was glad for that. Not even a woman would have been afraid of the blind, old, senile creature in the cabin; but the man had a hereditary nervousness about confronting the savage thing that was Matthew's hunting-mate. In reality Fenris was dancing with his shadow on the hill; and his tireless eyes had seen the heavy figure along the lake shore when it was still a half-mile distant.

A dog would have run to meet him with meaningless barks, to be cowed at the first straightforward glance. But Fenris was not a dog. He had a wolf's way of hunting. He waited, still as a gray fragment of a log in the thicket, until the man was within his master's door; then as a shadow steals, he crept down too.

The stranger's voice was loud inside the cabin. The words meant nothing to him; but the tone was fraught with passion that is an age-old instinct to all living things.

"You've got to kill that wolf," he said. "I've been missin' my calves, and I see where they go to now."

Harvey Cobb was a rancher living on the pass; and his herd ranged the Lake region. He was a typical example of a certain type of mountain man. He was sinewy and muscular, truly; but degeneracy was upon him. One could see it in the yellow eyes that never looked straight out; the long, unpleasant hair over the dark ears, the yellow, ugly snags in his black gums.

"But Mr. Cobb," the man objected, "how do you know it was my Fenris that done it? There's lots of wolves in the hills. I don't let him kill nothin' but deer."

"You lie, you mole!" the creature shouted. "I found one of my steers lyin' dead, just part of him left, and they was wolf-tracks near. I followed them tracks. They came within a quarter-mile of this cabin. I tell you, you'll kill that wolf, or I will!"

The old man's tone grew pleading. "But if I kill him, I'll starve to death. He gets my meat. We hunt together. I'll pay for that steer of yours. I'll put out my line of traps, and if you'll give me time enough—"

"That aint goin' to do. You'd die 'fore you had enough. Are you goin' to shoot that wolf?"

"I can't—"

"Are you, I say? Are you goin' to kill that hellhound?"

"No! I just can't, Mr.—"

IT was then that Harvey Cobb made a very serious mistake. It was such a mistake that might have very easily been fatal. He reached out his strong arms and seized the old man by the shoulders in a furious grasp.

A wolf cannot understand words. Even the tone in which they are spoken does not as a rule give an impression concrete enough to cause a muscular response. If Cobb had confined himself to words, he could have gone unmolested from the hut. But he laid on hands—and the wolf saw him through the doorway.

He sprang, simply a gray streak in the air. He dived straight for Cobb's throat. The fangs gleamed white, and the eyes were two terrible rings of fire. If that blow had struck, if those fangs had torn once at the white flesh beneath the straggly beard, Cobb would not have walked safely back along the lake shore that same night. If he had gone at all, it would have been as a spirit that whispered in the wind.

Old Matthew was blind, and so he did not see the spring. But he heard the leaves crack beneath the wolf's feet as he leaped; and he cried out. "Fenris!" he called in warning.

The wolf heard. He tried to check himself in mid-spring. He flopped in the air; but he had leaped too far to avoid striking Cobb at all. He struck him an awkward blow; and the man fell screaming behind the table. In an instant more Matthew was helping him back to his feet.

One of the wolf's paws had struck Matthew in the face and had left a crimson track, but otherwise he was unhurt. He bellowed once, like a bull in wrath, then reached for his pistol. And this was a second mistake that might easily have been fatal.

For he glanced at Matthew while he reached. And the blind old man stood ready, with his rifle lying easily in his lean arms. "Don't kill Fenris," he was saying simply. "Don't shoot at Fenris."

The man turned with a snarl. "I'll give you just six days," he said. "Just six—and then I'll come up here again. I said before, that if your hellhound isn't dead in six days, I'd kill him. I don't say that

now. If he aint dead in six days, I'll kill you!"

He meant what he said. If the old man had the extra powers of sense with which a wolf is gifted, he would have read relentless intention in the tone. Then wolf and master stood still as he started away, down the lake shore. The old man was sobbing, after the manner of senility. And the wolf, in whose nostrils still lingered the maddening smell of the crimson scratch upon the stranger's cheek, growled and muttered in his throat.

A WOLF cannot interpret words or measure days, or Fenris would have remained on guard. At midnight of the sixth day he was ranging the endless hills in the way that wolves have always done since the beginning of the world, singing strange, remembered songs to the moon. Besides, it was spring.

There had been a little female in the pack that Fenris encountered on the top of the ridge. They had sniffed and made friends; and he had been obliged to fight for her with the great gray leader of the pack. The pair were loping away, side by side down the long slope, when the air suddenly vibrated with the far-off report of a rifle.

No human being would have been able to hear the sound at such a distance. But the wolves' ears are tuned for the silence of the forest, and both of them heard it distinctly. Fenris stopped short.

No man can guess what mental processes he had as he stood stark still on the hillside. The female tried to urge him on. She would run forward a little way and whine, then return and bite gently at his shoulder. But he did not even look at her. The call she made to him stirred him to the very roots of his nature, but the summons from below was more urgent still. It was like a remorseless leash from which there is no escape.

He turned and sped off toward the sound. She whined to him again, and barked her promise. But he did not turn. She watched him dart between the thickets at the base of the hill, then raced off in pursuit.

He ran as a pigeon flies, straight to his destination. And when he was still a quarter of a mile from the cabin the wind brought to him a knowledge of what had occurred. A new, strange smell was in the air. The hair rose stiff all along his spine.

Old Matthew lay upon the threshold of the door.

The wolf checked his mad flight, slid for an instant from the momentum, then sniffed once at the curious stain on Matthew's shirt-front. He whined softly, pleadingly, and thrust his cold nose in the warm flesh of the throat. The old man struggled to waken.

At first he only whispered when he tried to speak. He tried to raise his arm to caress the great neck, but he lacked the strength. And the wolf, a breed too proud to lament his own wounds, lifted his head in a forlorn howl.

"I'm done for, old boy," the man said at last. "The devil shot me, after all. And I've been praying for you to come."

With a supreme power of will he groped with his hand and took the wolf's lean jaw in his. He turned the head so that the green, savage eyes were just before his own. It was almost as if he could see into them.

"Listen, Fenris!" he breathed. "Can you hunt once more for me?"

The blind eyes of the man grew like hard flint. He was not weak and senile now. He lay at the very frontier of death, but strength for a moment had returned to him. The wolf's howl broke in the middle, and ended in a low growl.

"You weren't here when he came," the man said again. "*And can you hunt once more?*"

IT was to be another hunt, then—such as so many times they had had together on the hills. The words were the same that the man had always used. The wolf whined with savage eagerness.

Then the man began to creep through the open door. He went on hands and knees, tracked at every motion. The wolf kept behind him, trying to understand.

They crawled out into the twilight; and now they paused at a little place just in front of the open door where the man's groping hand had encountered an empty rifle-cartridge that had been ejected upon the ground. There were tracks here. The man could feel them. They were quite deep in the soft soil. He pointed to them, and pressed the wolf's head down toward them. The dog caught the scent, and uttered one short, savage bark.

It was the sound that the old man had listened for. He had heard it many times before—always just as his lean hunter

sprang in pursuit of his prey. The wolf's eyes were green flame; a passion and a madness glowed in his own blind eyes.

"That's it!" he urged. "Chase him down, old boy—and make him pay! I can't rest easy in my grave unless you do. *Now go!*"

He motioned with his arm along the lake shore, in the direction that the tracks led. The motion took the last of his sudden strength. His eyes seemed blind and dull again, and he went prone in a curious, huddled heap.

But he heard the wolf sniff once more at the footprint, then spring away on his tireless legs in pursuit.

FENRIS did not attack at once. He waited his chance. This was not a chase in passion or fury. It was simply a hunt.

An animal is not a stranger to wrath, and may even have an elementary understanding of vengeance. He may strike as a dog strikes, like a whiplash, in defense of his master if he has seen the raising of a weapon. But killing is a dispassionate business in the wilderness. In the creed of preyer and prey, such a thing as deliberate and crafty tracking in the name of vengeance is unknown. If this pursuit had been made in wrath, it would have been a quick chase, a daring charge, and death from a remorseless bullet.

But this was simply a hunt, at his master's command. Perhaps it partook of an intensity and fire such as none of his hunts ever had before; and truly, the game was of a sort that a wolf as a rule dares not attack alone. But Matthew had commanded it, with fire in his blind eyes; and if the command had been for Fenris to throw himself off of a cliff and die, it could not be disobeyed. He felt no hatred against his prey. Deliberate hatred seems to be only a human passion.

But Fenris did feel the madness of the chase. He felt his blood pounding in his arteries, and the old blood-madness from which no beast of prey can ever quite escape. Besides, he knew this blood. He had been vividly aware of it one previous night, when his own claw had brought it to the man's cheek.

He did not run his fastest. He went deliberately, and any passion that he felt did not confuse him in the least. Behind him the she-wolf whined and howled, but he did not glance at her.

For the sake of lust or of power, a wolf will often throw caution to the winds and disregard any odds or any danger. But the laws of hunting are different. In the hunt no beast that can offer a dangerous resistance must be attacked except in case of necessity. No chances must be taken when bellies are to be filled. The weak must be chased, and the strong allowed to go unmolested. There is no such thing as sportsmanship in the hunt. The very life of the pack depends upon its supply of food; and no vain passion, or pride, or fairness, must interfere.

The pursuit of Harvey Cobb partook of the nature of a hunt for food. Just as a wolf, tracking a moose to exhaustion, will attack only when its prey is weak from starvation, Fenris had no intention of attacking when Cobb had the advantage of a firearm.

It was such a cold-blooded, remorseless hunt that could be native only to the remorseless forest and the unbending mountains. The man kept to the open shore of the lake on the long walk home. He did not trust the thickets. His mind was thronged with pictures such as no man can see forever and keep his sanity. Often he turned his head and looked back. Then all at once he heard the brush crack, in the thickets just beside him.

He stopped and raised his rifle. The moon showed him plain. It was a luster over all the water, and it revealed the shore-line until it vanished about the shoulder of the hill. The thickets grew within fifty feet of him, all about the lake-margin, but he could not see into them.

He started on, and again a twig cracked. He did not pause this time. He hastened his step.

ALL the way to his cabin Cobb heard the sound. There would be long periods of silence, that were even worse to bear than the sound of the inexorable step. Then a leaf would rustle gently, or twigs of shrubbery whisper together. The forest was perfectly still except for these things. His own feet made no noise in the sand of the shore.

He walked ever faster, but the step kept pace.

Once he turned and fired, aimlessly, toward the sound; and the report echoed from hill to hill as if it would never cease. Then he began to run.

He ran till his breath gave out. Breath-

ing in great sobs, he halted to listen. He had not heard the wolf run beside him—if this remorseless pursuer was indeed a wolf. Perhaps he had dropped behind. Then he uttered a long, shuddering gasp, for he heard the step again. The thing was still beside him.

Thence he took the little mountain road that led to his cabin. He was still able to see about him. The forest was mostly open, and the moonlight streamed down between the trees. Surely, he thought, he could catch a glimpse of his pursuer now. He had his gun cocked and ready.

But Fenris knew how to stalk his prey in open forest. He took advantage of the brush-clumps, and sometimes he kept the trunk of a great tree between them. The man looked ever over his shoulder. He whirled now and then to aim at a shadow; and only once did he see the wolf itself. It looked gray and monstrous in the moonlight. The wolf saw him raise his gun, and leaped aside. The bullet sang by him harmlessly.

But he was more careful thereafter. A man is but a clumsy creature, after all, and it was easy to shadow him without being seen. Thereafter the man knew of his presence only by the occasional crack of a twig or a rattle of a pebble. And soon he was in his house, with the door locked between.

But this was only the beginning. The wolf did not flee back to his fastnesses at the approach of day. When the sun came up, and Cobb went out to feed his stock, he was ever aware of eyes that watched him from the thickets, and steps that followed him wherever he went. He had enough memory of the walk home to carry his rifle with him; but it was of little good against a foe he could not see.

It was not the kind of thing that human nerves can endure for long. He ran back, panting, to his cabin.

In the afternoon, when he ventured out on the hillside, the step was still behind him. It was like a shadow. And it seemed to be always watching, always waiting.

THUS the inexorable chase went on. The man left his cabin only by necessity, and then he kept his rifle always in his arms. The wolf was always just behind him. He heard him creeping through the lush ferns of the creek-bank, and he listened to the rolling of a pebble disturbed by his cautious feet. It was an

ever-present menace when he hunted his meat on the ridges. He always locked his cabin at night, but even then he was not at peace. The thing crept about his house all night. Watching at his window, he could sometimes catch an instant's glance of the great, gaunt shape that ever waited in the thickets, but it always vanished before he could get his rifle to his shoulder. Sometimes he heard it howl a little, like the wailing of a ghost that wanted vengeance; and sometimes he heard, farther off, a soft, enticing whine that he could not explain or understand.

He could not sleep at night. He began to think that Fenris was not just a wolf. He seemed to be imbued with a spirit of vengeance, of pitiless intent such as is wholly out of accordance with the nature of animals. He began to wonder if the spirit of the murdered man stalked at night about his house in the body of a wolf. At first he forced the thought from him as a nightmare; but always it returned to him. And ever he drank deeper of his pocket flask.

He began to fear the darkness—even the darkness of his own cabin. He tried to keep his fire burning all night. And one night, the sixth since the chase began, he got out his little store of money and counted it.

It was enough. He could escape. He could walk down into the little city at the base of the mountains, and then go by train to a larger city. He had enough money to buy his food and clothes for many months. And when he had to return again, surely the gray fiend that dogged his steps would be tired of the chase.

He would have started that night, except that he feared the thickets through which he must force his way. He resolved to go in the morning. And all that he had to do was sleep one night behind locked doors in the glow of his fire, and he would be safe.

He thought out every detail of the plan. And then, taking his ax in one hand and his rifle in the other, he went out to his wood-pile for enough fuel to last through the night.

Again the moon was in the sky, and the silence was over the Lake region. He went warily; but he seemed to be the only living creature in all the forest. He listened, but the only sound was the faint moan of the wind in the pines—a sound that is

almost silence itself. But he paused once more before he bent to load his arms with wood.

Somewhere on the hillside, two hundred yards away, a shadow moved. Just for an instant the moon revealed it as it trotted through the thickets, and he saw it was a wolf. It seemed to be fleeing from him. It did not occur to him that it could be any other animal than the great Fenris that tracked him night and day. He held his rifle ready, but the shape did not reappear. And all at once he shook his fist at it.

"You devil!" he screamed in fury. "You gray witch! I'll be gone to-morrow. Tonight's your last chance, and you're running away. And old Matt Hicks can rot in his cabin, for all I care!"

But Fenris was not in the thicket toward which he shouted. It was his last chance, but he had not run away. Even the little female, whimpering her promise, could not make him turn. At that instant the wolf was crouching, just a shadow in a pile of shadows, on the opposite side of the woodpile from where Cobb stood.

Then the man bent to load his arms—and the wolf leaped.

SOON after this the silence came again. It was a deep hush, wherein all the forest people grew tense and listened. The

deer, feeding in the thickets, stood with ears pointed and muscles twitching. The grouse poised on their perches, ready to take flight. And the buzzard, always the most interested of all, stretched up his grotesque head from his dusky wing.

But the hush was broken, all at once, and with terrible emphasis. It was the long, wild, exultant cry of a wolf who had made a kill. It was a cry of triumph, too, of blood-madness, and of realization of power. For the wolf had killed the greatest game of all. He had killed man.

The female came down to join him, but he did not let her touch the body. It was not his meat. It belonged to some one who lay still and lifeless, some one already almost forgotten, in a cabin on the lake shore. The hunting was not his, that he could let the pack feed. He had tracked the prey and killed it, but only as a tool of a hand that was stilled. By the laws of the forest which are, when all is said and done, the laws of life, none of his kind could molest it. And only he himself might return from time to time when the glory of his strength was on him, and laugh his triumph from the hill.

He made the little female understand. And whining happily, with the magic of the spring upon them, they loped together into the darkness of the forest.

"THE FLYING LION," another of Edison Marshall's fine stories "From a Frontiersman's Diary," will appear in our next issue. And it will have worthy company—Albert Payson Terhune's "The Winner," an exciting story of a horse-race; H. Bedford-Jones' "Irregular Brethren;" Edgar Jepson's "The Great Loudwater Mystery;" Lemuel Lawrence de Bra's novelette of San Francisco, "Tears of the Poppy;" Holman Day's joyous "Nemesis Fried Loose;" Gladys Johnson's "Without Wireless" and many other notable contributions. You may count on a treat indeed when you open the forthcoming, the August, number of **THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.**

Adventures in Vaudevillainy

ART FURBER takes a vaudeville act on the road, and the reports he sends to the owners turn their hair gray — but they'll cheer you up amazingly.



by
I.K.Friedman

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.,
Oct. 15th, 1918.
O'Brien and Gluckstadt,
Theatrical Enterprises,
1826 Thespian Building,
Chicago, Illinois.

GENTS:
Arrives here this morning to give to-night the first performance on the road of "Lim Koung Lu and Co.," our grand act of Chinese jugglers and acrobats. Was surprised to find waiting for me at theater your long special delivery letter, signed by your Mr. Gluckstadt. Notes right away that your Mr. Gluckstadt almost faints when he returns to Chicago from French Lick, where he goes for his health, and reads contract which your Mr. P. Sullivan, now no longer with your firm, signs up with me during your Mr. Gluckstadt's absence from town. I judges from above that your Mr. Gluckstadt does not stay long enough in French Lick to get full benefit from same.

You writes: "Was our Mr. P. Sullivan so drunk he couldn't read when he signs contract with you?" My answer to this question is that before firing Mr. P. Sullivan for signing said contract with me, you should have asked him for above information. How do I know how drunk he has got to be before he cannot read? Also how do I know if he can read no better

when he is drunk than when he is sober? I am self-educated and did not go to school with your Mr. Sullivan.

"Under no circumstances whatsoever," you writes, "do we consider ourselves bound by such an insane contract with you," and that I must think you are as crazy as your Mr. Sullivan was when he signs this contract, if I thinks you will stand for terms of contract. My reply to same is, Mr. Gluckstadt, that no matter how crazy you are on account of contract now, you will feel better about same after I has the act out on the road for one year and makes for you as much money as Mr. Sullivan thinks I will make when he signs contract for the firm out of which he has been fired.

Notes you states you will walk up the 21 flights of stairs of the Thespian Building and jump off the roof before you gives me \$75 per week for my one-third interest in the Lim Koung Lu and Co., besides \$75 a week salary for managing the same on the road. This is your own private business, Mr. Gluckstadt, and if it is all right with the owner of the Thespian Building to use his roof and stairs for them-exercises, it is all right with me.

HOWSOEVER, I am deeply insulted when you hints that in your estimation I makes a side contract with Mr. Joy Sing Fat, which I gets to bring this act

up to your office for booking, and splits even with him on the \$100 per week you must pay Mr. Fat for act. If this was true, I would not be insulted, because it would take a mighty smart man to make such a kind of side contract with Mr. Fat. Believe me, the only way I could get this \$50 off Mr. Fat is by holding the same out of the \$750 per week I collect for your firm for the act and by sending Mr. Fat \$50 instead of the \$100 per week to which he is honestly entitled according to contract. Can show you how I can hold out for you this \$50 per week if you will make the same worth while. Am willing to entertain any liberal proposition on this point. I am working for your interest as well as my interest in this act and do not want it all, even if I could get it all by taking advantage of the contract which the late Mr. P. Sullivan makes with me. There is plenty I could do to this contract, if I was a crook, without taking no advantage of the same.

Was not surprised to learn, Mr. Gluckstadt, that you could not believe your eyes when you reads in contract that your firm must relieve Mr. Joy Sing Fat of responsibility for returning them Chinese acrobats and jugglers back to China inside one year and that you must pay back to Mr. Fat \$10,000 if all or only one of them Chinese skips and Uncle Sam grabs them bonds which this Mr. Fat deposits with Uncle Sam's Immigration Bureau for return of them Chinese.

If Art Furber was Uncle Sam, he would let one of them Chinese skip any time so he could nab them-\$10,000, but since the same would go in Uncle Sam's pockets and not mine, what would there be in it for me if I lets one of them Chinese skip? There would be nothing in it for me, so you can make your mind easy that I will not let them Chinese skip. Think them Chinese are already back in China!

Will say, Mr. Gluckstadt, that I agrees with you that your late Mr. Sullivan was all kinds of idiots for not striking this bond clause out of contract, and I would have told Mr. Sullivan what kind of idiots he was, only Mr. Fat refuses absolutely to let me handle the act unless I finds some sucker to relieve him in full of responsibility for bonds. So, Mr. Gluckstadt, you could not expect me to go down on my hands and knees and beg your Mr. P. Sullivan, no matter how drunk he was, to strike this clause out of contract. I am

not in business for the same reason you goes to French Lick, namely, for my health.

AM yet more surprised to learn off you, Mr. Gluckstadt, that from your slight investigation of my character you are far from satisfied with same and that in your estimation I am not a fit person to manage this act, handle weekly for your firm \$750, deduct salaries, railroad fares, other expenses, etc., from same and to be trusted with remitting to you the balance regularly. I will say little on this point, howsomever, because you will change your mind about my character as soon as you gets balance regularly. Also will say I do not think no less of you for coming out cold turkey and telling me you learns from Doc Daniels, the dog show of which I oncet takes on the road, that I "gyps" the Doc on dog meat and everything else that can be charged up to dogs, sells his leaping grayhounds and gets his fox terrier chewed up in dog fights so I can make a few dollars on the side for myself. If you did not come out cold turkey with the above, I could not deny the same to ease your mind. You have got enough worries without worrying about what is told you by this Doc Daniels, which is only sore because he thinks I have now got the chancet to make for myself a big piece of change off this Chinese act. Will confess frankly, howsomever, that it is true that I owes the Doc a bunch of coin when I winds up his dog act for him, but you can tell the Doc for me that he gets back this coin when I winds up the Chinese act for you.

Now, Mr. Gluckstadt, I will positively not answer your question which asks me if I does all them things to Doc's dogs, what can you expect I will do to them Chinese for you? The reason why I will not answer this question is that I already have answered the same by denying all them vulgar insinuations on the part of Doc. Also, Mr. Gluckstadt, I will say that dogs is one thing and Chinesees another and I cannot honestly tell you what you can expect until I has had them Chinesees on the road for a while and learns their ways.

Notes you demands absolutely that I furnishes your firm with a bond for \$10,000 as a guarantee that I will handle honestly all the money I collects for same. You writes me: "It is our custom, broke

for the first time by our Mr. Sullivan when drunk or crazy, to demand bond from all managers of our acts, and there is nothing we can find out about your past which would justify us in making a violent exception in your case, Mr. Furber." Also you writes: "We have not yet had no time to consult our attorney, the famous theatrical lawyer, Mr. Marx Lederthal, but on the face of it, this contract with you is too lopsided to be binding. Even Abie, our office boy, which goes to law school nights, says he can find in this contract one dozen loopholes through which he can stick his feet even deeper than our Mr. Sullivan puts his feet in the same for us."

You states also: "The writer does not wish to insinuate that you plies our Mr. P. Sullivan with liquor before you can get him drunk enough to sign such a contract, although such is the writer's guess; but our Abie testifies that our Mr. Sullivan dips his pen in the whisky-flask and starts to drink the ink when contract was signed, and that it took hard work on your part, Mr. Furber, to set our Mr. Sullivan straight on the ink and whisky proposition. This alone makes the contract as void as the three empty bottles of whisky which the writer finds on Mr. Sullivan's desk, and unless you furnishes our firm with said bond at once, we will consider you discharged and send somebody else on the road to manage for us this act of Chinese acrobats and jugglers, which the writer would not have touched with a pair of asbestos gloves if he had been at home when our Mr. Sullivan mixes his whisky with our one quart bottle of red ink."

WILL say concerning all the above right off the jump, Mr. Gluckstadt, that the same would make good comedy for my other act, "Apple Blossoms," which I would be glad to book through your firm when I am through for good with Lim Koung Lu and Co. and can take that elegant act, the talk of the whole vaudeville world, on the road onctet more. But with me, no matter how you look at it, business is no comedy, and from the strict business point of view, I would not give half of what it will cost to bribe dramatic critics for them objections you and your Abie is manufacturing against said contract. I will defy any straight judge to declare this contract void because your late Mr. Sullivan gets excited off the amount of money

he is going to make for you and prefers ink to whisky. This is a matter of taste, and I am not going to waste no time in arguing what will happen to ink, if there is alcohol in the same, when prohibition is made a law.

Also will say that if you have not yet consulted your attorney, the notorious Mr. Marx Lederthal, you are in luck, because in my estimation all you can ever get out of this Mr. Lederthal is a bill. This crook of a Lederthal represents my ex-wife in our divorce suit, and if I has \$10 for every time he is going to sue me I would not need to take out on the road Lim Koung Lu and Co. for our interests. If your Abie has not learned more law already than this Lederthal knowed up to the last time he sues me, all I have got to say is that Abie wastes more time nights than he wastes in your office by day figuring up batting averages for the Sox and Cubs.

Concerning bond will say that I agrees with you perfectly. It is only a good business principle to demand bond, and I do not hesitate to say, Mr. Gluckstadt, that if you was taking out any show for me I would demand a big bond. Howsoever, what good is this principle if I cannot get bond nowheres? You cannot expect that Joy Sing Fat will give me this bond, because then he would be as bad off as you are now and have no benefit from getting released off bond to Uncle Sam, which your Mr. Sullivan slips to you. The Furbers was always an artistic and not a money-making family, and the only Art Furber I ever knowed which could furnish me with a bond for \$10,000 was the uncle after which I am named and which dies in Canada after looting a post office and leaving me nix. So enough about bonds, Mr. Gluckstadt. There is plenty other topics for correspondence besides bonds and firing me, when under terms of said contract I can only fire myself. Even that crook of a Lederthal will agree with me in this.

Being a good little noter, I notices also, Mr. Gluckstadt, that you expects me to account faithful for every cent paid out for expenses and to enclose report of same with weekly remittance to your firm. Am happy to comply. Will always enclose statement of expenses with remittance, and when there is no remittance I will forward statement of expenses anyhow. Am glad act is not booked far ahead at \$750

because I am positive after I breaks act in and injects a few of my own ideas into same that you can get \$1,000 as easy as you are now getting \$750. But this is in the future and I do not believe in mixing the present and future the way you alleges your Mr. Sullivan mixes ink and whisky on you. Howsomever, as soon as I pulls down \$1,000 for the act I will talk new contract with you. Both of us should keep in mind weak points in present contract and take same out of future contract. I am not the kind of a guy which thinks he knows everything and is willing to learn nothing off experience. With best regards to your firm and hoping I have explained all to your complete satisfaction, I will close now because I have got to find a livery stable in which I can shave them Chineses. Also some farmers with which I can play pool.

Your devoted servant,

ART FURBER.

JEFFERSON CITY, MO.,

Oct. 18th, 1918.

O'Brien and Gluckstadt,
Theatrical Enterprises,
1826 Thespian Building,
Chicago, Illinois.

GENTS:

Wishes to report right away that act goes over something immense two nights ago, since when I have no time to write. It is a riot and knockout. In Jefferson City there is now only one topic for conversation, namely, "Art Furber's Acme of Acrobacy." You will please note I have changed name of act. Certain people will at once claim I done this to advertise myself. This is a lie! I am not out to advertise myself, but to pull in the little dollars; and "Lim Koung Lu and Co." is a name that sounds like a new kind of chop suey and would bring as much coin in the box-office as would a smallpox sign.

Also the fame of Art Furber and his act "April Blossoms" which is still the talk of the whole vaudeville world is known everywhere on the map where the United States goes; so everybody which seen my act "April Blossoms" will now want to see my "Acme of Acrobacy" act. Why should we throw away the thousands of dollars it costs me to advertise myself and "April Blossoms"? I will answer your question by saying I do not intend on no ac-

count whatsoever to throw them thousands away. Now do not get mad right away and write me back: "Our Mr. Gluckstadt almost faints when he learns you will charge up to expenses them thousands of dollars for advertising your act. Before our firm pays you them thousands, our Mr. Gluckstadt walks up the 21 flights of the Thespian Building and again throws himself off the roof of the same."

I am warning you in advance that I has no intentions of charging up all them thousands to which I am legitimately entitled. Of course the law firm of office-boy Abie and Marx Lederthal will claim I am not entitled to above, but since I am throwing in the same free, it would be only a waste of time and money to get the opinion of this law firm on the above or any other matter. All I am charging up to act is cost of printing new handbills, advance notices, etc. Am mailing samples of handbills, etc., which I hopes will please you as much as they pleases me.

Also wishes to say as the last word on this topic that there is no reason why Art Furber and O'Brien and Gluckstadt should break their necks to advertise this Lim Koung Lu, the leading acrobat of our act. Supposing, for the sake of the argument, that this Lim skips or falls off the bar and breaks his own neck while doing them dangerous stunts, which I tells him not to do until we can get more money for the same, then all the money spent on advertising him goes into his coffin. But now he has my permission to skip or break his neck, because no matter what would happen to this Lim, the name of "Art Furber's Acme of Acrobacy" is as good as ever, and we can always get another Chinees to take the place of this Lim.

In fact have already made a deal with one Hop Lung, which runs a laundry here and which used to be an acrobat in Chinees, to travel with act as substitute for Lim. This Hop tries to hold me up for \$30 per week but finally agrees to take \$18. This shows I am prepared for anything which can happen to act. Am prepared also for kick on the part of your Mr. Gluckstadt, who will write me: "Under no circumstances whatsoever will our firm stand for this charge of \$18 per week besides expenses for this Hop Lung. If you hires one Hop Lung on us in Jefferson City, how do I know how many Hop Lungs you will hire on us in St. Louis, Kansas City and elsewhere along the line? Also, unless I

hires a detective to go along with act and check up on you, how do I know how many of them Hop Lungses, which exists in your imagination only, you will charge up at \$25 per week per head. You will at oncet fire this imaginary Hop Lung which you hires on us for your expense account at Jefferson City, Mr. Furber."

In answer to the above will state before you has time to write me the same, Mr. Gluckstadt, that I am on the road with the act and can tell better what is needed for the great financial success of the same than you can tell from your office or the roof of the Thespian Building, and it would be just as foolish for me to tell you how to run the office or the roof when I am on the road as for you to tell me how to run the act when you are in the office or on roof. Also it would be crazy of me to save this \$18, which you thinks is going into my pocket and not Hop's, and ruin our grand act.

I have got even a better argument to prove I am right; for I just finds out that this Lim, like all Chinesees, is an opium smoker, and you never can tell what them dope fiends will do. I tells Lim that on no account will I stand for the use of dope, and he tells me that smoking dope is his "pidgin" or business so long as he does not smoke during act, and if I does not like the same I should find a Chineee acrobat which will not hit the pipe before and after the act, which he defies me or anybody else to do. Smoking hop is custom in his country, he says, and comes as natural for all Chinesees as for anybody in theatrical enterprises to kick about expenses, he says. He says also if I would take his advice I would pay no attention to them kicks or pipe-hitters so long as the act runs right.

I am only telling you this in advance of kicks so you will know what I am up against with this Lim Koung Lu. Howsomever, before I has the show out on the road for very long, I will show this Lim and everybody else who is the boss of the same. He has got me and your firm where the hair is short just now, but after this week him and the rest of them Chinesees has guesses coming to 'em, as well as salaries, if they thinks your firm or me pays for the opium they claims they cannot act unless they smokes. Only board and food, and not opium, is in their contracts, and they have got to live up to letter of their contract, the same as I am

living up to letter of contract I makes with your late Mr. P. Sullivan. If they can prove opium is food in Chineee and was included in contract, they have got to hire for a lawyer somebody else besides your famous Marx Lederthal, which does nix but write letters threatening to stick me in jail unless I pays my ex-wife alimony, when all the alimony my ex-wife gets off me would not pay for the postage on them letters.

Please note also that Mr. Lucius C. Claver, the owner of the Opera House here, is even a bigger crook than Marx Lederthal, if such is possible. This Clavers rigs up a scheme by which I can put \$75 in my own pocket if I will stand for trimming your firm out of \$150. It was the slickest scheme of which I ever hears, but needless to say I refuses to be a crooked party to such a transaction. He wants me to O. K. his claim that only 10 Chinesees appears in act instead of 12 called for by contract, so he can hold out the \$150 which is coming to you legitimately.

Of course this crook of a Claver will be writing you that I puts this scheme up to him and he refuses to fall for the same, which will constitute another proof of what a liar he is. I did not even dream of pulling off such a trick. One man cannot think of everything. Also if this Claver says I tries to hold him up for more coin by claiming only the Chinese acrobats and not the jugglers was included in contract, and that I refuses to let jugglers go on stage before \$50 extra is paid me, you can write back right away that I already have denied the same.

Also, Mr. Gluckstadt, if this Lucius Claver carries out the threat he makes to me and writes you that he will not book no more acts through your firm for wishing on him a manager like me, all I have got to say is that you are lucky to get rid of such a crook. It is money in your pocket. I will put plenty of this kind of money in your pocket before I winds up "Art Furber's Acme of Acrobacy" for you and takes out for you "Art Furber's April Blossoms," the forthcoming appearance of which I advertises everywhere. For instance, before each appearance of "Lim Koung Lu and Co." I steps on stage and tells audience they will enjoy my "April Blossoms" even more than my "Acme of Acrobacy" and they should watch and wait until same is booked by O'Brien and

Gluckstadt, which besides being some more of this good kind of advertising for me and your firm, costs us nix. Trusting all the above is as much to your entire satisfaction as it is to my own, I beg to remain

Yours for business,
ART FURBER.

P. S.: You will be pleased to learn that farmers around here is plenty and prosperous and I am doing wonderful in pool. Will make more off pool, if farmers and my luck keeps up, than I can expect to make off act. Also there is more enjoyment playing American farmers pool than managing a Chinese act. Now, do not get scared right away again and write me I am already getting more than I earns and you do not pay no attention to them kinds of a hint for a raise. I will come out cold turkey when I wants a raise and not hint around the bush.

Also forgets to call your attention to fact that there was an article in local papers this morning warning all farmers not to play pool with Art Furber, manager for O'Brien and Gluckstadt for their "Acme of Acrobacy" act. This article claims that I "lemons" or swindles them farmers at pool—another rotten lie! If your firm stands back of me the way I stands back of you, you will write this crooked editor that you will sue him for libel unless he retracts them lies about me. Howsom-ever, if you will not stand back of me, I am man enough to fight my own battles and will pull the nose off his face the next time I meets the same on the street. Of course this rotten sheet, which is sore because I am first to get to them farmers' coin, roasts the act and claims I ruins the same by long speeches which introduces each of them Chinese to the audiences. This crook of an editor, which is also his own dramatic critic, writes in his article on the act: "Mr. Art Furber, to whom we pay questionable homage elsewhere as a virtuoso at pool, might do well to follow the example of his marvelous Chinese acrobats and preserve a strict silence while he is on the stage—which, to the constant irritation of the audience, is most of the time. The way the modest Mr. Furber, on whom the shy violet has nothing, distorts the queen's English can be equaled only by the elasticity with which the rubberlike Mr. Lim contorts his body." Enclosed is clipping to prove all them sentences which I

quote above is true and not invented by me. Do not let any of the same worry you. I will show this editor for calling me a virtuoso and them other names!

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.
Oct. 20th, 1918.

O'Brien and Gluckstadt,
Theatrical Enterprises,
1826 Thespian Building,
Chicago, Ills.

GETS telegram, signed by your Mr. O'Brien, at 10:30 this A. M., but was too tired to get out of bed and open same until 2:30 this P. M. Was out all night trying to find one Chinese acrobat by name Ping Pong, which skips after show was over. To find this Ping Pong costs me over \$50 in time taken from playing pool. Wish to say I will positively charge this \$50 up to act. Why should I go in my own pocket for them \$50? Will return to this question later on in this letter and give elegant answer to same. Just now would like to state that I reads twicet the telegram signed by your Mr. O'Brien and notes your Mr. O'Brien requests me to answer by wire, collect, sum I will take down for my interest in act and to resign managership of act. Am not answering by wire because my answer would be too long to send by wire, and I have got the interests of your firm at heart and do not intend to throw your good money away on them grafting telegraph companies. When Art Furber works for anybody, he treats their money the same as if it was his own.

Also have not yet had time to give your proposition my careful attention, and I do not jump at no business proposition the way your Mr. Gluckstadt, which I hopes is still with us, jumps off the roof of the Thespian Building in his imagination. First I have got to make up my mind how much I will accept for my interest in the act, second how much I will take to resign as manager of the same, and third how much I will take for doing both.

Now you will say right away, Mr. O'Brien, that I am making three propositions out of your one proposition, in order that I can get more money off you. I agrees with you there, Mr. O'Brien. But why shouldn't I divide this proposition into three parts when I can get more money then by taking the same as a whole? All it takes is time for figuring, and unless

more of them Chinese skips on me, I will have plenty of time for figuring.

You will admit, Mr. O'Brien, that you and your Mr. Gluckstadt has consulted with your attorneys, the office boy and Marx Lederthal, and finds, which I tells you at oncet without studying no law at nights, that contract with me cannot be broke. Or this Marx Lederthal tells you it will cost you more money to put up crooked scheme to break contract than to buy out my interest if I will sell out for less than you would have to pay him for suing me, fixing crooked judges and serving on me warrants if I skips with them Chinese, etc. So I have got to figure out how much more I should get for selling my interest than this crook would demand off you for trying to break a contract which him and all the crooks in the United States cannot break.

Howsomever, before starting in with figures, Mr. O'Brien, I will come out cold turkey and say your telegram makes me think that you are as much worried about the act as is your Mr. Gluckstadt, and that your firm wishes to freeze me out of act. I am not insulted by above, because same is only a business proposition, and if you two thinks you can make more money by freezing me out than by letting me stay in, you would be foolish not to turn the freezer on me. Only, of course, freezing me out would cost a little fortune for ice, and I got to figure out to how much I am entitled for saving you all them bills for ice that this crook of a Marx cannot cut.

NOW, we will say for the sake of argument, Mr. O'Brien, that I have got a heart and will take \$900 for my interest in the act when I could make double, if I was as big a crook as Lederthal, by hiding out on you only one of them Chinese. Howsomever, on no account will I sell you my interest for less than \$1,200 if I resigns as manager of act at the same time when I sells you interest in act, because my interest is worth much more to you if I am froze out altogether than if I still stays in as manager and only gets frost-bitten.

This brings me to what should be your next question—namely, what will I take to resign as manager of the act? Will answer your question by stating that I will take \$1,500 for resigning managership if I still keeps interest in act and can travel with same at my own cost to see that new

manager is not one of them kind of inventors which can handle expense-accounts in more new ways than Thomas A. Edison, which writes me that "April Blossoms" is the greatest act in vaudeville, can handle electricity. As I said to you before, I does not think I knows it all, and if there is any new ways of fixing expense-accounts, I am eager to learn the same.

Now, your next question will be this—namely, how much will I take to resign straight out and be done with the same? My answer to this is that I will accept \$3,000, because then my interest is reduced to nix by your putting in as manager of this act some crook which figures out to a cent how much the act makes and grabs even this cent for expenses. So now, Mr. O'Brien, you have got my reasons for demanding \$900 for my interest in act if I remains manager; \$1,500 if I resigns as manager and keeps interest in act; \$3,000 if I resigns my managership after selling my interest in act for \$1,200; or \$4,200 for a complete freeze-out.

Right away your Mr. Gluckstadt will say them figures is ridiculous and throws himself off the roof of the Thespian Building again. All right, I am willing to blow myself for a wreath for your Mr. Gluckstadt, but under no circumstances whatsoever will I take less than \$4,200, because I figures that being with an act for one year is worth to me \$5,000 and this \$800, which should belong to me with time and patience, is enough of this kind of cash for me to put in your pockets. Nobody else but Art Furber would be fool enough to throw away them \$800, and I suppose I will get no thanks from you for the same. Howsomever, I expects no more thanks off you than when I trims a farmer at pool, even if pool and vaudeville is only learned by being trimmed. Trusting all the above seems as reasonable to you as it does to me, and assuring you I will watch expenses and other interests of the act just the same as if I was not soon to be frozen out of the same, I beg to remain

Your diligent manager,

ART FURBER.

P. S. I sees that I forgets to give my best arguments for charge of \$50 for finding Ping Pong. Will enclose same with expense-account from St. Louis, where I arrives on 22d. Would mail remittance and expense-account from here prompt on evening of 21st, only there will be no re-

mittance. Expenses eats up remittance, which always happens to me first week I takes out new act. You can ask Doc Daniels or Rob Hinckley, the author of "Apple Blossoms," if this is not so. Also the Doc and this Hinckley will tell you how much they gets off me from the second week on. So do not look right away on the dark side, Mr. Gluckstadt, and rush for roof.

Be an optimist until you hears from me at St. Louis, from which you will be surprised to get a big remittance. Also a bigger remittance from Kansas City, Omaha and everywhere else. Think how big remittance grows by time I reaches San Francisco and learns from experience how to reduce expenses to a science. All I asks is complete confidence in my promises. If you keeps up confidence until I can reach Frisco and puts them Chinese on the boat for home, both of us is satisfied. Do not let your Mr. O'Brien, Abie, this Marx Lederthal, or anybody else talk you into the idea that I am a quick worker which makes up his mind from the jump that I must get all which is coming from me off this act inside two weeks if I am to get same off you at all. Them ideas is all lies and leads only to roof.

WHILE writing above, just gets a registered letter, signed by Crook Lederthal, which warns me that sending false statements through mails constitutes a penitentiary offense and that I will be prosecuted if I attempts same. All right—if you agrees with Crook Lederthal in this opinion, I will oblige you by sending no statement of no kind through mails. Crook cannot bluff me! On this account you gets no statement of expenses off me from now on, and you can thank Crook Lederthal for same. Hereafter will keep account of expenses in my mind only, subtract same from income of act and send what is left to you without no explanation of how I got difference.

If O'Brien and Gluckstadt is satisfied with this careless kind of bookkeeping, I am. I can get along on the same just as well as on any other kind, and it is easier on my imagination. I will show Crook Lederthal something for trying to railroad me to penitentiary in cell of which he learns all the law he don't know. I will go before any court and swear he holds out on my wife all the alimony I sends in his care for her. I suppose he would like me to send all remittances for you in his

care. Believe me, them remittances is just as well off in my care.

Also please tell Crook Lederthal for me that from now on I sends back to him unopened all letters he writes to me. I am not communicating with no man the first name of which is Crook. Such a crook will keep on springing ideas for sending me to penitentiary by correspondence course. On account of them ideas which Crook springs, I will have to guess at expenses from now on.—Will say right away I guesses them Chinese skips on me unless they is moved into a hotel and out of livery stable, where they ketches cold and cannot smoke opium because proprietor of stable claims them fumes from the opium dopes his horses and prevents his getting any work off the same.

Guesses also I must rent a flat for them Chinese because there is no Chineese hotel in Jefferson City, and white hotels refuses to accept same. Also guesses I cannot rent flat for less than one month. Have not yet guessed cost of flat for one month. It is my guess also that I will have to add to expenses the cost of catching rats for them Chinese to eat. In livery stable them Chinese ketches their own rats, and the same costs the act nix. I knows your firm is too reasonable to blame me for this. I cannot spend all my time looking for flat which is filled with rats so this item can be saved. Please note all above is guesses and not statements.

Will come out cold turkey, howsomever, and state positively that one of them Chinese drops his opium lamp in the straw of the stable and sets fire to same. Guesses can square proprietor from \$50 to \$150. Now, don't guess right away, Mr. Gluckstadt, that I am guessing from \$50 to \$150 so I can charge up \$100 to something else if other expenses should leave something over for a remittance. Am giving them guesses only to prove, if you insists on statement, that I can make statement by guess as well as any other way. Also if Lederthal guesses he can send me to penitentiary for guessing, he has got another guess coming.

Wishes to state, not to guess, that I reads my copy of contract again, and according to my spelling of the same, if I does not remit to Mr. Joy Sing Fat his \$100 per week for interest in act, then your firm is responsible to him for the \$100 which I do not remit. This is the fault of the ink which the late Mr. Sulli-

van drinks, and not my fault. If you disagrees with me on interpretation of contract, then we will call the same a difference of opinion. But hopes you agrees with me; otherwise poor Mr. Fat gets nix this week. Of course you can do this poor Mr. Fat out of the \$100 which is coming to him if you thinks it would pay you better than not to do him. However, in my opinion, honesty or paying Mr. Fat would be the best policy, because Lim Koun Lu and Fat is warm friends, and if Fat does not get his coin, he will telegraph Lim to skip, and if this Lim skips, it will cost you more than to pay Fat. This is a statement and not a guess, because Lim comes to me and tells me himself he will skip unless I pays Fat. But why should I go down in my own pocket to pay Fat? Your question is too foolish to answer. Will suggest instead that you sends me \$25 for squaring this Lim Koun Lu, so he will stick with act no matter what Fat telegraphs him. Then you can tell Fat when he demands off you the \$100 to which he is justly entitled that he should write me for same. Then I will write Fat that he should play on his Chineese harp until he gets off me again the \$100 which I already have remitted onct to you to pay to him. See? In this way you saves \$75 cash besides the coin it costs you to pay me and other detectives to find this Lim when the same skips on you after he gets telegram from Fat. Also think of bond which Uncle Sam is as anxious to grab on you as I would be if I was in his shoes! \$25 is the least I will take for this job! Positively!

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo., Oct. 22d.
O'Brien and Gluckstadt,
Theatrical Enterprises,
1826 Thespian Building,
Chicago, Ills.

GENTS:
One half hour ago the postman leaves in the private office of theater here a special delivery letter which your firm addresses to Mr. Lucius C. Claver. By good luck I am in the office when Mr. Claver is out of the same. Will come out cold turkey and say I opens envelope and reads letter because I am afraid this Claver will put something over on your firm unless I performs my duty and keeps myself informed on what is going on between your firm and this crooked crook.

Will state also I must do something to kill time until this Claver returns and pays me per promise check due to act for week. I have got the interest of your firm at heart and refuses to wait for check longer than after the afternoon's performance, which is the last performance except one of act here or anywheres else. Will state also at onct to relieve your mind of all worry that this Claver returns and surprises me by keeping his promise and giving me check, which I now holds in my pocket for you.

Notes first thing in your letter that you orders Claver under no circumstances whatsoever to pay me money due your firm for act. Notes also you states you will hold him responsible if he pays me money. Of course I will be glad if you can hold Claver responsible and if you can get money out of this crook twicet. I has all I can do to get the same onct.

Notes second that you writes: "Our legal representative, Mr. Marx Lederthal, is chained to bed by sickness or he would take pleasure in coming at onct to Jefferson City to make things hot for this Art Furber, in comparison to which both horns of a ram is so straight that the same could be used for a ruler." You writes also: "Our Mr. Lederthal will use every effort to break this chain and arrive in Jefferson City before last performance to prevent any chance of money due us from falling into the hands of this Art Furber. We are well aware it would take the law plus a cannon to get this money away from Furber if he gets either of his hands within one half mile of the same."

In reply to above will state, Mr. Gluckstadt, that this is a free country and that you are entitled to your opinion, though why you should consider me a crook after I am only one week with the act is a great mystery to me. I do not believe you are sincere and really means to call me such a vile name. This Lederthal talks you into thinking I am a crook and if he does not apologize, I will pull the nose off his face.

Notes also that you writes to Claver: "In case our Mr. Crook Lederthal does not show up in Jefferson City on time to get check before close of last performance of act, you will greatly oblige us by paying all salaries to Chinese members of troupe, list of which we closes herewith. Please observe, Mr. Claver, we say Chinese only. Pay no attention to claims of Mr.

Furber for salary. Unless Mr. Furber done himself an injustice in these masterpieces of impudence, his letters to us, he has at least tripled his salary on us and seized the same several times in advance."

In answer to above, Mr. Gluckstadt, will state that I will take as much pleasure in calling Mr. Claver's attention to your request as Crook Lederthal will take in breaking the ball and chain to which he should be tied. Relieve your mind of worry and roofs, and think salaries of all members of troupe except Art Furber's will be paid as soon as this Art Furber, which you deeply insults by calling a crook, cashes the check he will hold in his pocket until your Marx Lederthal, the famous theatrical lawyer, arrives. You will remember, Mr. Gluckstadt, that in the very first masterpiece of impudence you gets off me, I tells you cold turkey that all the money you pays out to Crook Lederthal for fees, trying to pin warrants on me, etc., is wasted. I do not claim to be no prophet, but I will leave it to you if I have not made good on the above warning, to which you pays no attention.

Also notes in your letter to Mr. Lucius C. Claver that you imparts to him in confidence that you have sent your Abie Cohen on to St. Louis to make arrangements in advance for arrival of act. Will state that above confidence is perfectly safe with me, and I promises faithful not to betray same, but in my opinion you would be throwing away less good money if you keeps this Abie at home to figure batting averages on the Sox and Cubs.

NOTES also you writes to Claver: "We will hand it to Art Furber that he has got more energy than a whole penitentiary full of crooks. Unless he invents some new way of doing us up every minute, he has got the idea that he is sitting around and wasting our time on us, and is haunted by the illusion that he somehow overlooks one dollar that never will forgive him. Among other deals, too numerous and crooked to mention, we have learned that Furber attempted to extort money from St. Louis almost to San Francisco in advance of the act's appearance in above cities, and the said money not being forthcoming, he threatens to cancel our contracts on us. In other words, Mr. Claver," you writes, "this one week has cost us more worry than a whole lifetime

devoted to theatrical enterprises that we have sent around the whole civilized world with one half the trouble this loafer makes for us with 'Lim Koung Lu and Co.' in Jefferson City alone."

Am answering for Mr. Claver in regard to them matters, Mr. Gluckstadt, that Mr. Claver wishes to say that what Art Furber done in St. Louis and elsewhere interests him as much as what them Chinesees will eat after they gets back to Chinees if they ever succeeds in reaching the same, which Mr. Claver and Art Furber both doubts. Mr. Claver agrees with you that Art Furber is a first-class all-around hustler, and on that account can be trusted to run his own business, collect in advance, etc., better than anybody else can do them things for him. Mr. Claver states also that he has had all he could do to keep up with Art Furber while Art Furber was in Jefferson City, and he suggests that you writes Art Furber for an explanation of why he collects money in advance and is sure Furber will explain the same in his explanation to your complete satisfaction. Mr. Claver thinks also that the greatest mistake your firm ever makes was to fire anybody as faithfully devoted to your interests and money as this Art Furber. Howsomever, Mr. Claver asks me to say he minds strictly his own affairs and does not mix in with St. Louis, firing me unjustly, etc.

Mr. Claver wishes to state also he has got no time to read the rest of your ten pages of kicks against Art Furber, and that most of the same is even too ridiculous to answer. You admits yourself, Mr. Gluckstadt, that if you could only get them Chinesees back you would congratulate yourself for getting rid of this Art Furber so cheap and quick. All right, we will say for the sake of the argument only you gets back all them Chinesees. This shows right there how well I manages the act for you and what a grand mistake you makes in letting this loafer of a Lederthal talk you into believing I am a crook. Under no circumstances whatsoever will I accept your apology and assume management of act again.

NOW we will say, for the sake of the argument only, that you does not get them Chinesees back. All right—but this has got nothing to do with loss for first week, which stays nix whether or not you gets back them Chinesees. So either way

your losses on act for first week is nix, and you can congratulate yourself on them losses. I congratulates you also.

Notes you states in letter to Claver that what is going to happen to them Chinese worries you more than anything else in life, and that you could sleep oncet more if you could only make a wild guess at the answer to the same. Will say in reply for Claver that I will take you into my confidence, the same as you takes me into your confidence regarding Abie's trip to St. Louis, and admit that I has not yet made up my mind what is best to do with them Chinese. Also, on account of other expenses chewing up income of act and leaving no money on which to pay salaries to anybody, I do not yet know what them Chinese will do to me. So you will agree again, Mr. Gluckstadt, that if you has my worries, you would run for the roof. You will agree with me also that I earns and does not steal every cent I gets. Howsomever, will tell Lim Koung Lu to tell them Chinese right away that the boobonic plague breaks out in Jefferson City and advise him to advise them Chinese to skip now and come back for salaries. Then all you have got to do is to write Abie or Lederthal to wait here until them Chinese comes back and to nab the same. Trusting all this will be as satisfactory as everything else I have done for your firm, and regretting that our pleasant and profitable business relations must now end, I begs to remain,

Your ex-manager,
ART FURBER.

P. S. Lim just comes to my room while I was about to put this letter to you in envelope, and I tries this boobonic plague scare on Lim. You will be glad to learn off me that it works something immense. Lim does not even wait to get my instructions about coming back to get salary. Howsomever, if I meets Lim or any of them Chinese while I am traveling in country for a rest, I will telegraph your firm, collect, wherever I sees the same. Am disappointed that in your letter to Claver you mentions nothing about booking my grand act, "April Blossoms." Will write you about this matter in near future when you have had time to think over and appreciate how well I done for you the first week I takes out "Lim Koung Lu and Co."

There will be another "Adventure in Vaudevillainy" next month.

The Spur

BONDY was fired. But he had a wife, had Bondy, and he didn't stay fired very long: a vivid story of the business game and some real folks.

YOU may remember that little financial depression in the early part of 1915. The February lake-breeze kept Chicago tempered or depressed—your view of it depending on your state of mind as an individual.

At the *News* office in Fifth Avenue a long line of men was curled out to the sidewalk, where it wrapped itself around the elevated pillars. Each man held a penny in the cold palm of his hand as he waited and shivered. When the afternoon edition of the paper, carrying the want-ads, came warm and damp from the presses, the whole line was ready to start forward with a lunge. It received the papers on the run, separated into units and as such retired against walls or posts to whip them open, run fingers down the long columns hopefully and begin anew the race for a job.

That line is Chicago's public criterion of prosperity or depression. When it is long, the sight of it, even from a warm limousine, is more chilling than any gale conjured up from Lake Michigan's ice floes. Have you forgotten that particular depression? The country was puzzled. Its financiers, who were wary, checked the reins of the economic horse and lengthened every day the line of job-hunters at the newspaper offices in Chicago. What would war do to America? There were rumors of great munitions-contracts even then, but



By **Harold Cary**

the prosperity that made a thousand millionaires before the year was over had not yet swept by the shores of Sandy Hook. The possibility looked like a mirage. Economists said that the war could not last the year.

On one of those bleak days the glint went out of the eyes of Bondy Howard. He knew nothing about the financial unrest that was stirring. He knew only that he was out of a job. That was the news he was carrying home to Eileen. Fired! Discharged from the bottom rung of a ladder they had hoped to climb rapidly.

Don't think of Eileen as a little wife who sat at home darning stockings, gossiping idly with the boarding-house women. Think of her more as a woman awaiting her turn. Call her lean, if you must, with a blaze in her Celtic eyes, that soft color of crimson asters faintly alive in her cheeks, that look that made women think of her tongue as sharp. Sharp? You should see her eyes and hear the lilt in her voice when she looks at her Bondy! Eileen couldn't be sharp, but oh, she was keen and quick to the point.

Perhaps your ideal of a woman is plump, a frame with soft curves, a thing that moves, on which to hang silks and satins. Don't read about Eileen Howard. For she it was who made Bondy a hell-raiser. She wove the fabric of dreams that pushed him on until—but wait.

THE light came back to his face as he bounded up the steps to their room. Her face between his two hands, he kissed her and whispered his news in her ears.

"Bondy! And why was that?" Right to the point she went, straight to what concerned her most. Not "What will we do?" but "Why?"

"Answer me now, and we'll get to the root. I thought you were due for a raise." That was her way.

"So did I, colleen. I can't explain it, and all they would tell me is that economy is ruling." He was earnest and puzzled.

"It's sure to be economy for us. How soon do you leave for good?" She smiled at her words.

"Two weeks, they say." He thought a minute. Just the day before, from the window of an elevated train, he had seen the long line of job-hunters at *The News*. He put the remembrance from him and turned to her brightly. "I'll see the chief to-morrow. I've seen only my boss, but the chief will tell me about things. He's square."

"Not yet, you wont." There was really a snap to that tongue of Eileen's, but she meant it for emphasis. You wouldn't call that sharp, would you? She was down at the root of it now; she was ready with something before even the youth of Bondy could recoil from its blow.

"You'll not see the chief until you have something to say to him—something constructive, something about that business of his that he'll be glad to know and feel grateful about.

"Boy," she cried, changing her tone as she ran over to his chair, "you're a wonder—you just haven't had time to think it out." That's all that she said, but not all that she did. She put in a new section of backbone. At supper that night the other tables in the dining-room stopped to listen to the conversation of that boy and that girl. It was wonderful to see them, bandying back and forth, with that light in the eyes of the both of them.

And Bondy had been fired!

JUST what is your definition of that word *impossible*? Getting married on fifteen dollars a week, perhaps? Well, then Bondy and Eileen had done the impossible.

They were used to good things, and of course they knew when they married that their clothes would last for several months, and it's true that he had fifty dollars in

the bank. But mighty green in their memories were a lot of clubs—amateur theatricals, fraternities, formal balls and all those things that youth has so lately adopted from the life of its elders. If you had helped Bondy pack his trunk, you would have noticed a dinner-coat ready to snuggle down beside a corduroy shooting-suit. Perhaps you would have found things for the same purpose if you had looked in Eileen's trunk.

More to their credit they did not believe that fifteen dollars a week will support a dinner-gown, even if that garment is all bought and paid for; but nevertheless they had married. It was the very year they graduated together from a university, and what a fight it had been from the very first day, beating the devil around the bush, but somehow making ends meet!

Don't try it unless you have their health and their love of a fight. They are still fighting. When they have a yacht, a fleet of motors, a place on Long Island Sound and a seat in the Senate, they will be fighting, beating the devil around that self-same bush, reaching out for new things that mean they must spend it all the day before they get it.

Now, what kind of theory of life is this? Give up the essentials and live on the luxuries, and what can you gain but heartache and misery? Let Bondy relate the answer.

It involves unbelievable dissatisfaction. Instead of having that pleasurable sensation of "look-how-far-I've-got-and-me-so-young," you think of yourself in a different light. Instead you believe yourself to be in a rut. You are always trying to get out, always wishing you were just about two years older and trying to do something real to justify yourself. That's how you get to be a hell-raiser if you have an Eileen.

You see things going wrong in the office or shop, or wherever they have your name on the pay-roll. You try to fix them. Some one gets hurt, metaphorically speaking. The result follows quickly, and you may get kicked bodily into the street for a meddler. But if you've done something real, if you have helped the little old pay-roll firm to eke out an extra per cent on its money invested, you get a new job and a raise. It's sure-fire stuff that takes only horse sense and a little surplus energy.

Eileen made Bondy a hell-raiser. I doubt if *he* ever would have considered it

as a mode of action. He liked to do things well, but he hesitated to reach out and do things better than they had ever been done before. You know how that is. It's harder than taking things as they come, and always you've more things on your hands than you can be through with by quitting-time. But Eileen led him on! She knew it, she was glad of it, she did it on purpose.

If you are pounding the keys in an office, if you're spending your daylight atop a long-legged stool, you'll appreciate the way of Eileen and Bondy. They've had more than you've got; and they are bound for a whole lot more. Bondy doubles his salary every two years, and although twice fifteen is only thirty, twice thirty is sixty, and after that? Opulence, perhaps—all the things you have dreamed for and hoped for. Gather around and listen.

IT was back before the war started; they were mobilizing even then, but we didn't think much about it, you remember. They were at lunch in that huge department-store in Chicago. Eileen had come in to shop for her father, who made his home forty or fifty miles up-State.

"Then you'll take the five-forty home?" Bondy had tears in his voice, just as he always did at thought of her going home.

"Always we're saying good-by, good-by, good-by!" he continued pettishly. "I'm sick to death at the thought of it. Stay in!"

"I can't stay," she answered dubiously. "Father will be angry and disagreeable for a week, and you can't come out over Sunday, because Mother will be just as disagreeable if I should bring you home."

He reached across the table and took her hands. "Stay in for good, Eileen—with me!" Perhaps it was the appeal in his eyes, perhaps merely the call of her own longing, or maybe, when it comes to the right moment* of all, no one ever resists. Eileen didn't.

There was no real reason why not, except the reason of the age, which foredooms most young people to wait for each other during the long years of apprenticeship when they need each other most. Why shouldn't they take the step? Did you ever hear of anyone who really starved to death, even people who have educated tastes and infinitesimal incomes?

"I will, Bondy," she said simply. That day their new life began.

They hurried over to the City Hall and hunted for the license bureau. She was weary, and so he left her sitting on the steps of a marble stairway while he hunted the clerk's office.

It must have taken him a full half-hour, for there was a long line of nondescripts, giggling and blushing, for whom he had to wait. Finally he came back to find Eileen convulsed with laughter as he approached waving the paper and assuring her that he had found the right bureau.

"Now for a judge," she said briefly, and jumped up beside him, completely in control of herself. It had taken courage to go through even this far in such a business-like, matter-of-fact way. They knew it would hurt Eileen's mother, for she would have liked a big wedding even if she was not fond of Bondy; but they felt that they had decided, and the only thing left was to do. It was the solution of their immediate problem. After all, why shouldn't marriages take place in just that way? When you get right down to the bottom of things, there are really only two people who are greatly concerned.

They were at the bottom, too. They honeymooned on the artificial lake in Lincoln Park. It seemed just right that they should spend it among the hundreds of clerks and wage-earners who were enjoying that August day. It was better than sitting on the community porch at the boarding-house.

No crisis came for six months. They had clothes enough to last that long, and the time for a raise in salary seemed rapidly approaching. It would have come, too, in the ordinary course of events, but things took the opposite swing of the pendulum. You have already read that Bondy was fired.

THE day after they decided that something must be done didn't prove an easy one for Bondy. He took the time by permission—they said, in fact, that he could have all the time he wanted to look up a new position—to canvass the advertising offices of the city. The gloom was thick in every office in town. He was welcomed, sure enough, but when the subject of jobs came up, the free flow of conversation was slowed.

"I had a nice day," he reported to Eileen, "largely because they remember that advertising campaign I did on Arkley Candies. They know I didn't do more

than a half of that job, but it has always interested them. As to taking on new men, they feel that they are being philanthropists to hang onto the men whom they have.

"There isn't a thing doing in the advertising profession except right in our own office, strangely enough. I hadn't thought of it before, but we *have* a new client. His work is barred to me, though—old Simons is going to write himself, because he can't find anything else to do. He's worked out the plans, and says he shall write every word of the copy with his own large hands."

He paced up and down the room slowly, and then Eileen jumped up, seized his arm and began walking with him as she talked. "Bondy, you've got it! You've got it!" she cried, just as though he did have it, which he most certainly did not.

"Got what?" he asked, bewildered.

"That's what you're headed for. The Argus Agency needs Bondy Howard to write *that* advertising campaign." She paused a moment. "What kind of a campaign is it?" You see, it is probable that Eileen had no more than the ghost of an idea herself as yet.

"It's for scales—weighing-machines for grocers and butchers. It is really a big campaign; they'll probably spend a hundred thousand dollars. The machines are remarkable, as fine as there are, but I don't know anything about them. They have never been discussed in the editorial department."

Eileen paced up and down. "I tell you, Bondy, that's the chance of a lifetime. I don't know exactly what it is, but I do know this: if you should evolve an idea, one that would make old Simons ashamed he had not thought of it first, you could make him like it. Couldn't you?"

They walked around and around the little table in the middle of the room, until finally she turned, all smiles, and said to him: "What are we going to have for dinner to-night?"

It was the stock boarding-house question, but he knew there was a new answer. "Scales," he shouted, enthusiastically. "We live, eat and breathe scales from now on. Though there is only a little time left," he sighed.

"Why, Bondy, of course, that's plenty of time."

Nothing but youth is capable of such extravagance, such snap judgments as have

lined the careers of Eileen and Bondy Howard. But then, you know, without youth the world wouldn't move very fast.

DID you ever think what a job it would be to go forth and try to sell an expensive, gold-painted, price-computing scale to a canny grocery man? Now remove yourself a step. Try selling him the same piece of equipment with nothing but printed matter. Understand, he already has a very good scale, fairly accurate, sealed by the weights-and-measures inspector.

Impossible!

Bondy and Eileen were working together on one of the few nights they had left for their problem. They had studied and talked, read piles of catalogues, stacks of literature and a half a dozen encyclopedias on the subject. They paused, each grasping at some phase of the problem, and she broke their silence.

"Is there a Chicago branch of the Excelsior Company?" Eileen's words tumbled over each other.

"That's it!" exclaimed Bondy. "I'll go down there to-morrow and ask them—ask them—ask—"

"Ask them for a job as a scale-salesman! That's honest. You may need a job, and your one desire is to sell Excelsior scales, even though it is by the printed word and not by canvassing. That's what Simons should have done to get all their sales-arguments."

"But their sales-talk wont sell scales if put into advertisements," Bondy protested.

"Of course not, silly; but you have to learn more about scales than you can get out of the stuff we can read; so you will really appear intelligent when you are talking to grocers. You see, you'll have to make a study of scales as used in the stores, and when you have finished an inquiry among grocers and butchers, you can make an investigation among the people who buy in those stores to see what the real status of buyer and seller over Excelsior machines is. That's a hunch, boy. If you could find an angle for selling scales, hidden somewhere in that human relation, think what you'd have! If there is something interesting to the people who buy food in your copy about Excelsior scales, you've gone a million, billion miles past anything old Simons can write for his advertisements.

"Don't you see, boy, it would be dreadfully hard to get any good effect from advertising that interested only the stores. You must interest everyone who buys food!"

He was silent for a moment, and then he said calmly: "You are right. Here's an instance. I'll talk to Mrs. Pond. She is a real expert. She must buy forty dollars' worth of stuff over a scale every week to keep this boarding-house running. I'll bet she knows to an ounce what every mess of hamburger she buys costs. We are at a starting point, sweetheart."

He looked at her sternly for a moment. "Do you know what kind of a scale that chap has who runs the delicatessen up on Sixty-third Street? As a consumer of food bought over his machine, you ought to know something about it. Is it honest? Is it a—ah—well, I don't know what to ask you yet. But I will, I will."

"He's only got a meat-cutter. If he's a scale there, I never saw it." She was on the defensive.

"There you are," said Bondy accusingly. "People who buy don't know anything about scales. They might as well be buying with Chinese coinage. It's a shame and an outrage. They can't tell whether or not they are getting their money's worth from an honest dealer, or being cheated out of half the weight they pay for."

"But most dealers are honest, Bondy!" she protested.

"But look at the advantage the dishonest man has! He can sell at lower prices and steal the trade right out from under the nose of the honest man.

"You see, if he sells at thirty cents a pound and steals two cents by giving short weight, he makes the same amount of money as the man who sells honestly at thirty-two cents a pound. But the crook gets a reputation for bargains. It's a vicious circle."

THEY kept at it for hours, hashing and rehashing, working always with the dim hope that something really startling would turn up.

The next night he was tired and worn. He had seen the scale company, and it had welcomed him with open arms—specialty salesmen are scarce enough to make it worth while to the managers of branch offices to talk to every prospective salesman. The more Bondy heard, the more he realized that he was up against the

biggest job he had ever tackled. Lever arms and loose weights, computing charts and pendulums, danced a mad whirl through his mind. He knew one thing certainly from what they had told him—never could he become a specialty salesman. It took another kind of courage than that which he possessed, a wisdom that was not yet his.

"Eileen, I've got respect for those salesmen," he said wearily, smiling. "It's no snap to convince a grocer that he needs one of 'our' scales at precisely ten times the price for which he can buy one which will serve after a fashion. Think of it! Two hundred and fifty dollars for one of those machines! A week's gross return for some of those men."

Eileen ran over and perched on the edge of his chair, stroking his head. "Just wait till after dinner, boy, and you'll feel like a brand-new person. Then we'll talk."

And after dinner they discussed his notes.

"The cheap scales are accurate," he explained, "But a busy grocer can save money by using an expensive type because they are automatic, and because they do all his figuring for him—computing the price of one and three-eighths pounds of meat at forty-three cents a pound, or any other price and weight.

"That's the line of talk that sells 'em. The salesman convinces the grocer or butcher that he will save the price of the scale in a short time by giving accurate weight and getting an exact price for his goods. The woman who buys doesn't care about the extra cent, because it belongs to the retailer and because it is so small a part of the total price she pays. But those very pennies mount up a large proportion of the just prices for the butcher. If his profit on a pound of meat amounts to six cents, and he gives two cents overweight, or charges two cents too little, he loses thirty-three and one third per cent of his gross profit on the sale."

"But Bondy," Eileen broke in, "think what a task to explain that complicated line of reasoning to a man and prove it against all his prejudice. Advertising would never do it!"

"That's the flaw in old Simons' campaign. That's the argument he depends on, and I'll bet he is lying awake now trying to find out how it can be over. He's too good an advertiser not to know what a difficult thing he is undertaking.

"Oh, girl, we're on the right track, we're on the track. Ideas! Ideas, come hence!" He seized her around the waist and danced about the little room with abandon.

BUT the cold, rainy day that followed melted the snow to slush underfoot, and pursued Bondy with gloom and discouragement. He knew he was wrong as he swore to himself that there wasn't a retailer in the world with an atom of brain. Yet he couldn't think that for long as he stood in a well-ordered, clean place of business, clerks busy, cash-register jingling, food from every climate in the world spread before his eyes.

"I just haven't caught on yet," he muttered, walking to the next shop.

Every proprietor who was willing to give him a moment said that he used the best scale in the world because it protected his customers against short weight, and protected him against charging too little or giving overweight. "Those are the ideas that come to the surface first," thought Bondy. "I'm getting them digested, and before long I'll be ready to understand anything new that I may be able to dig up."

He covered the district like a blanket. He talked to shopkeepers from Dorchester west to Halsted. Sixty-third Street stretched before him like an unending path of life. The lights went on at three o'clock, and he was weary enough to quit for good. He wasn't getting a thing, but always the hope of what the next man down the street might have to say drove him on. He plugged until way past time to go home to Eileen. Then he threw back his shoulders and made for a street-car.

"After all," he said to himself as he rode home, "it's these things that make us worth while. Right now, without an idea of value in my head, I'm worth twice as much to the firm as I was before starting to dig on this job. I've discovered an advertiser's problem. I know it can be solved. I've proved to myself that trying to sell goods without advertising is a mighty painful, a mighty slow process. No wonder the Excelsior people want a campaign. They lose seventy-five per cent of their salesmen every year because the job of selling without advertising is too difficult. Advertising is the spice in the manufacturer's wine—if it's done right. But gosh, what a failure it can be if it goes half cocked!"

How they talked that night! You must

appreciate the ability she had to go right to the point. If he was too tired for discussion, she bucked him up with food before she let him say a word. If he thought he had an idea, she put in all the objections she could think of, just to give him practice in answering them, to bring out the high lights, to clarify his own mind.

Big ideas? No, a thousand times no. "Big ideas don't sell goods," said Bondy in soliloquy. "It takes method and hard work. Present a logical idea in a logical way, and you've got it. Most people think a writer grows long hair and writes in a burst of inspiration, when in reality it's nothing but work, work, work, like digging post-holes."

He hadn't been able to get many facts about what people think of scales. Mrs. Pond rambled around trying to answer questions and told them a few little things. Her chief concern was the "terrible high prices of 1915." How she has managed to endure through the years since is a marvel. The minister's wife had once accused a grocer of dishonesty—only to find that his scales were right, adjusted frequently, passed by the weights inspector, while the one which she had used to check him on wouldn't weigh within half a pound of the correct figure. Most of the people to whom they talked didn't know a scale from a cash-register.

THEY discussed it, mulled over it, bandied it back and forth. No burst of inspiration—don't let that idea stay with you for a moment. They hewed out of the rock of ignorance, gave the result shape, until its form was beautiful. Then came the reaction. They were so close to the plan that it looked ugly—impracticable.

Head in hands, face white, Bondy thought of it, looked at it more closely, more carefully. "It ought to work, sweetheart, it ought to work," he said to her, "but darned if I can tell."

Eileen nursed him along. It was a moment for encouragement, when with fright in his eyes he saw the zero-hour and feared for the consequences. "Of course, you can't, and you sha'n't try. That's for old Simons to tell. You've done a job that needed to be done. There's only one more thing: You tell me the story, just as you'll tell it to the chief.

"I'm Mr. Simons." She went into the part. "Good morning, Mr. Howard. Something I can do for you?"

"Good morning, Mr. Simons." Bondy fell into their play and began to talk. "I've been digging around a little during the past ten days. Thought I might help a little on the new Excelsior account, before I left."

They had it out, practicing for the interview to come, the interview on which the two of them had staked everything that was important to them at the moment.

The idea? Simple, easy, complete. One of those ideas that make people ask, "Why didn't I think of that." Not really an idea, but a method.

Bondy's message to Simons was to sell scales to the grocer's customers instead of to the grocer himself. Not really sell them, of course, but to interest the customers in scales. Convince every housewife in America that her own dealer must have an Excelsior scale, that if he has one he has purchased the best equipment that money can buy, that he always charges the correct price, gives correct weight and can be depended upon in every way.

"And Mr. Simons, that is mighty nearly true, too," declaimed Bondy in his little play with Eileen. "In my investigation I've found that it is the most honest, the most up-to-date retailers who have the fine weighing-machines. It's a hall-mark on a store to have a good scale, and if we can make it a hall-mark that means something to the butcher's customers—well, there you have large-scale selling, not a pun, but selling on large volume.

"That's something the housewife can appreciate. She will understand a symbol, but to ask her to want her dealer to use a scale that has jeweled bearings, or weighted chart-spiders, or light lever-arms, or any of those technical things is shooting at the stars. Those things don't mean much more to the grocer than to the housewife. He forgets them as soon as the salesman leaves. But *you* can make him think he *has* to have an Excelsior, and rightly, too."

"Get the housewife to ask him why he doesn't use Excelsiors. She will say: 'I wish you had one of those fine scales I've read so much about.' Mighty soon he will have one, too.

"It's the only way to sell them, sir. It's economically sound. It will put over your campaign with a bang. It will help every housewife in the land, every grocer will be more prosperous, and the Excelsior will become one of the greatest manufacturing concerns in this country. If you put over

this plan of mine, they will have to have a new factory to care for the flood of orders. They can reduce the price of the machines because they can use quantity production methods. They'll make you a director in the company; they'll do everything in the world for you. That will be promoting business on the new basis—the basis of large-scale production and large-scale selling."

Sound right to you? It's as sound as a dollar!

EILEEN was smiling as he finished, the smile of pride she had in a job well done. All she said was: "O. K. boy. Let's get some sleep now."

They did have courage, didn't they? Their very bread and butter was tied up in that speech that Bondy was rehearsing. There couldn't be any slip; yet you could argue easily enough that they hadn't provided for all the contingencies. But some way, even though there isn't any old reliable proverb about it, it is often the people who provide for every contingency who run along for years in a rut without ever meeting one.

So Bondy's step was light enough as he went off to work the next morning. That's a privilege belonging to youth, perhaps. He was sick enough inside, and he made pretty poor picking of it all day as he worked out his last bits of strategy, did an odd job or two around the office and kept his eyes open for a chance to see old Simons. And the chief failed to come into the office at all.

When the time came to go home, Bondy was really morose. Of course, it was true that the rent was paid until the end of the month, and they could have their meals at the boarding house for that length of time. But he had to summon his last bit of courage to be cheerful as he bounded in to Eileen.

"I've got an idea!" he exclaimed joyously as he met her. "I'll find a job as a waiter, and then we'll always be sure of something to eat. I'll slip little French pastries into my pocket for you." He held her close to him until she bent back her head and looked into his eyes. They stood devouring each other, glad that the day was over and that he could be home once more.

"Better yet," she answered at length, "I'll get a job as a cook in the same restaurant, and we will wax fat and lappy from being together and laughing all day long."

And after dinner they talked and talked; it must have been two in the morning before they decided to go to bed.

"To-morrow we're jobless," he said gayly, as though his words had meant: "To-morrow is Sunday."

THAT last morning the copy-chief came over to Bondy to say a kind word of appreciation, express his personal friendship and condole with him on his hard luck. Bondy waved him away with a smile and told him: "I'll conquer the world about the time they bury you with honors."

The copy-chief smiled in answer and walked over to his desk, muttering under his breath words that Bondy could just catch. "What does that young upstart mean by that? That might mean a couple of different things."

Bondy reached for the telephone on his desk and called Simons' office. "Miss Martin," he asked when the chief's secretary answered, "will you arrange for me to see Mr. Simons this morning? You'll let me know just when? Thank you."

He went over to his own boss, the copy-head, and asked to see Simons' plan on Excelsior scales. "I might be able to give you a suggestion on it." Bondy was not really sure that the copy-chief had it, but it was worth asking for.

"Why—ah—I don't know why not. Yes, of course." The boss laughed self-consciously, making Bondy feel that already he was an outsider.

"You said last week, didn't you, that this was from the mechanical point of view?"

"Yes, it tells about the jeweled bearings, similar to those used in a watch, though larger of course, the compensated adjustments, and so forth. It is a bit technical for a literary man like me, but it proves conclusively that they are superior machines."

"Will that sell them?"

"Simons is convinced, and he is the doctor. Besides, there is no other way under the sun to sell them. They are really the best thing of the kind a grocery or meat-market can use."

"I wish we had something for you to do on it. I really hate to see you leave. Where are you going?"

Bondy wrinkled up his face good-naturedly. "That's a secret," he replied. Under his breath he continued: "—from you, me and Eileen."

He went back to his desk and studied the plan as Simons had prepared it, so that before the time came for his interview, he had the presentation well in mind. It set him back a little to find out how much Simons really knew about those machines. He had done more than Bondy thought he had, but even the knowledge of that failed to frighten Bondy badly. Waiting for an interview was painful. Nothing is so liable to upset a salesman as having to wait for the chance to talk to his prospect. A salesman is exactly what Bondy was that day—salesman of his own services.

He began to fidget around, making himself nervous. He thought of Eileen, probably walking in the park, cold as it was out of doors. She was thinking about him, wondering about his talk with old Simons, whether he was now talking, or was all through talking, or even whether or not he was going to have an interview.

He thought of the discouraging outlook—looked it fairly in the face for the first time. It would be a rummy job for him to try driving a truck, handling freight, hustling boxes and barrels. It made him feel that he was soft now. He flexed his arm and found that the bicep was still good; yet he was soft. Ought to take some exercise. But two dollars a day at trucking—might not be any jobs at that to be had, either. There was that line of job-hunters at the newspaper office. But with Eileen to push, perhaps he could get in somewhere. It warmed him to think that she was always beside him, ready to give him a lift wherever she saw the chance.

He remembered her words last night: "You're that man's equal. You know more about scales than he does. We know he hasn't done as much investigating as he should if he has done any at all. He has taken the word of the manufacturer. But as an advertising agent he hasn't any business to stop there. He is doing something morally wrong. He isn't ready to spend a cent of the Excelsior Company's money. He knows it. You've just got to raise a little *hell* with him, Bondy, and it makes no difference whether or not your idea is startlingly new or not. Ideas don't win battles. Method is what brings results in business."

HE smiled as he remembered that here she had taken out the little black book and written down something. They called it the epigram-book, not because it ever

held epigrams, but because they used it to record and preserve little bits of wisdom that came their way. He asked to see what she wrote. "*Method is more valuable than ideas.*"

Together they read some of the old ones. Queer! He noticed now for the first time that each one of them represented some little "big moment" in their lives. The first entry had been made back in the college days after their first stirring experience together. Sailing together in a little racing yacht, they had been caught on the far shore, by then the lee shore, as a black squall rolled up out of the southwest.

With Eileen handling the mainsheet, they had brought the boat back together, and as they had swung up to the yacht-club dock with sails rattling and the sharp little reports sounding as the reef-knots cracked against the canvas, an old skipper had walked out, leaning against the gale. He had watched them bring the yacht in, and as he approached he cried: "She was sure a sight for sore eyes, as ye came in!"

That night they had made the first entry: "Two can sail in a big wind if they know each other well." Bondy laughed now as thought of the little entry, its lack of craftsmanship and its unaffected sincerity.

The telephone jangled. Bondy came to with a start. He listened in silence to a word spoken from the other end, hung the receiver on the hook and dropped his head in his hands. "Wont see me," he muttered, "wont see me!"

He straightened up quickly a moment later; the eyes that had glassed over began to snap. He slammed open a drawer, seized a piece of paper and began to write. He threw that aside, swung his typewriter into position, inserted a sheet and began to write furiously. In five minutes he was through. He thrust the sheet into an envelope with a vicious jab, sealed it, took down his hat and walked out of the copy-department door.

He stopped at the desk of Simons' secretary.

"Miss Martin, will you please hand this envelope to the chief? It's important."

She looked at him, doubting, hesitated, took the envelope and disappeared into Simons' office.

Bondy put his hat on her desk and straightened up.

Now Simons was tearing open that en-

velope with its half-crushed note within. Bondy could remember every word he had written:

Mr. Simons:

I have been fired. I am no longer in your employ. I have read your plan for Excelsior scale advertising. That plan is not a complete one. It shows that you really do not know what those machines can do, how to sell them, or what the chief merchandising difficulties are.

I do. It will cost you \$30.00 a week to put me back on the pay-roll, although for the past six months I have been drawing only \$15.00. But if you put me back, it will be purely because you feel that you have to. I defy you, as the head of this organization, not to give me the next hour of your time.

BONDMAN HOWARD

The chief had finished reading it now. He was laughing probably, hang him.

MISS MARTIN came out of the private office, nodded her head toward Bondy superciliously. He turned and walked into old Simons' office as fast as his legs would carry him, looked coldly at the chief, hauled a chair up to the desk, sat down and faced him.

"Out on Sixty-third Street, in the twelve-hundred block," began Bondy, "is a big grocer. He has seven scales, every one of them with jeweled bearings.

"What's your copy appeal on Excelsior scales? 'The scale with the jeweled bearings,' is it not?" Simons nodded absently.

"Then listen to this: That grocer's scales cost him just one seventh of what Excelsiors would have cost him. He is known all over the South Side to the trade as 'Short Weight Stuber.' Answer me now: what's the effect of your campaign? Will it sell scales, or wont it?"

Bondy fixed his chief with that snapping pair of blue eyes. He was fighting now.

"Confound it, Simons, you're going to waste the perfectly good money of the Excelsior people. You haven't upheld our true standards in your copy plan. You haven't studied the real merchandising problem. You thought you would be able to put it through and, for instance, to do without me, just because money is tight.

"What's the first thing you've to do when the contract for a campaign is all signed? Investigate! Don't grab the nearest copy-appeal or the ready-made ideas from the factory.

"You've lost your imagination. You're planning to go back to writing copy when

your real position is an executive one. You're trying to cheat the books by doing copy work and letting me, for instance, run along and hunt a new job. If you do that, you'll very probably throw away the hundred thousand dollars that the Excelsior Company thinks it is going to invest in advertising.

"I know how to sell Excelsior Scales. I can put it over. But it will cost you thirty dollars a week, as I said, to put me on the pay-roll again. I know you've thought of me as a sort of an office-boy, but you can think differently from now on.

"Now, sir, will we talk business, or shall I say good-by?"

"Young man, we might talk business, but not on any such terms as you suggest. I learned a long time ago not to buy anything that I hadn't seen."

"Right, sir!" cried Bondy. "I knew you were square. If you think what I have to say is worthless, go as you please. I don't want a bargain. I want a hearing."

AND by that time, it was a pretty sure thing that Bondy was going to get a hearing. It was a pretty sure thing, too, what the outcome would be, even if Bondy's idea had been of no particular value. Thirty dollars a week may mean the difference between living and starving to young married couples, but if any real service is given in exchange, it means precious little to an advertising agency.

When it was all over, Bondy found Eileen waiting for him as he came in with the proud news written all over his face. He relived his triumph for her. Then he turned to her with a question.

"All that time that I was working to put it over this morning, what were you doing?"

She hesitated, as though just a little uncertain as to how she might phrase her answer, but finally she let it come in chronological order. "I had lunch downtown, in a real restaurant, a restaurant with music and linen. Then I went to a department-store and bought myself some—some—silk pretties, and you some new neckties. I thought you should have them, getting such a raise."

He looked at her in amazement, but she continued:

"You see, sweetheart, I'd just got to prove to myself too, all the confidence we had, and I did."

Pure Business



by
H. Bedford-Jones

TWO white men in a remote Chinese desert—there began a chain of events dramatic indeed.

TWO men, two white men, were walking down that desolate road which leads to Yench'ang. It was an old road, more ancient than the Roman eagles or the Golden Fleece, trodden by the honorable feet of emperors and sages, and the country to either hand was dead. The two white men stared at the country with haggard eyes. Behind them lay the sweet mountains and torrents, the deer and pheasants, the trees and white sun. Here were but dead land and the dead path of feet gone down into dust, the eternal dust of the loess plains.

The two men halted. One of them lifted a canteen to his lips and drank, while the other watched him burningly. The drinker lowered the canteen and extended it; the other seized it, wolfed down a swallow, and slowly, reluctantly, returned the canteen, as though impelled to do so only by some overwhelming force. Yet the other man was the smaller.

"Ten dollars," said the smaller man, buckling on the canteen.

The big man winced. He was a strapping, bronzed fellow, muscled like a grayhound; but now, as he opened his shirt and loosened a large money-belt that was about his waist, he exposed bandages which incased his chest and sides, under his arm-pits. He opened the belt and laid bare a roll of gold-pieces overlaid with notes.

"Why didn't you hog the whole thing, you dog?" he snapped bitterly.

"I'm not a thief." The smaller man's voice was cold, rebuking. He took the gold-piece which the larger man extended; it seemed as though he were about to get a blow with it, and he stepped quickly backward. "Look out!" he warned.

The big man laughed in contempt. "No fear. But you'll pay some day!"

The two white men proceeded along the dead road. Behind them lay Yenan Fu and other cities of the *hsien* class, cities which for thousands of years had been border fortresses against the raids of Hun, Turk, Mongol. But these cities were dead, and over them reigned the tomb of the emperor Huang Ti, already asleep two thousand years when Christ was born.

There were no fields, no farms. The miserable wretches who still lived, endured upon the one autumnal crop of millet. Thousands of summers and winters had seen these lands slowly worked into desolation, until not even a tree now lived. The very soil was dead.

"We'll get into Yench'ang sometime tonight," volunteered the smaller man. The other paid no heed, but strode mechanically forward, head bowed and crowned with white loess dust. One gathered that he was willing a broken body into movement.

The road curved frequently, to avoid the tremendous rifts which had cracked athwart the dry baked loess. Sometimes these had been bridged; but many of the bridges were gone, and the road followed the lines of least resistance. For this was the north of Shensi, the land of China's pride and desolation.

Three days previously Grenham had left Hsian Fu with a guard of six soldiers, and enough money to pay off his men at the oil well which he was putting in at Yench'ang. His horse had stumbled at an inopportune moment, and the temptation had been too strong for the six soldiers.

Grenham had wakened to find himself broken in the bowels of earth—they had flung him into one of the loess rifts. Broken as he was, he had somehow crawled up and out in a horrible agony of effort, had regained the road's edge, and had fallen. There Copperton had come upon him.

COPPERTON was a by-product of civilization, a man seeking opportunity, a tramp whose selfishness and opportunism was unlimited. He had bandaged and revived Grenham, and had taken a fat fee for the job before they moved onward. Copperton had an automatic pistol, and used it when they met two roving soldiers of fortune; and he charged Grenham for the protection also. The money-belt under Grenham's clothes had escaped the search of the six soldiers.

No one was on the road but the lowest coolies and a few bandits. To obtain animals from the cave-dwelling natives was impossible. Grenham could walk and did walk. Copperton guided him, fed him, watered him, saw that his bandages were in place over the broken ribs—and charged him well. The gold in Grenham's belt was rapidly changing hands, but Copperton refused to be taunted into such a thing as robbery.

"A start in life," he said coldly, "—that's all I need, and I'm getting it. Don't you kick! You've got plenty. Two years from now I'll be a big man financially. Just the start! I've got the brains to push it."

Grenham made no answer, and Copperton eyed him with an uneasy furrow to his brow. There was something terrible about this big man's silence, about his entire lack of comprehension and understanding.

"Get the right view of it, Grenham," he argued. "Haven't I saved your life? You don't object to paying a little for it; you and I are different men, of course—you're the type to whom life means everything, money nothing. But with me, it's different. I have imagination. I suffer the tortures of the damned from it. You're primitive—I'm cultivated, refined. You strive and fight for the sake of striving and fighting; I do it for the sake of the reward. So! And I need the money."

Grenham still made no response, although Copperton had in those few words effected a very clever and keen bit of analysis.

WHEN night came, Yench'ang blazed out ahead of them. Yench'ang Hsien was peculiar in that it had not been sacked by the brigands which infest northern Shensi; and it was because of its walls and oil that the city had not been sacked. Yench'ang had oil to burn, and burned it. Each night the walls were topped by a ring of oil, set in pans a yard apart and fired. Not only the city but the entire countryside, were lighted up; consequently the brigands remained elsewhere.

Copperton stared at the beacon city and turned to his staggering companion.

"I've brought you in safe," he said coldly. "Now turn over the other half of the sum, as agreed."

Grenham whipped himself into action, got out his money-belt and all but emptied it into Copperton's hand. Then he wiped the white loess dust out of his haggard eyes and looked at Copperton.

"Wait!" he said unemotionally. Just the one word: "Wait!"

Copperton laughed. "Nonsense, Grenham—don't look at it in the wrong light. Haven't I saved you? Yes. Aren't you paying for it? Yes. Then we quit even. You've no kick coming. It's a business proposition."

"Oh!" Grenham wiped his eyes again. "Then—give me a receipt."

"To prove there's nothing crooked about the affair? Certainly. It's what I term it—pure business."

Copperton produced a notebook, sat down and with his pencil wrote out a receipt:

Received of J. G. Grenham, for saving his life, etc., the sum of four hundred dollars, gold.

THOMAS COPPERTON,

Grenham took the receipt and pocketed it.

"All right now," he said thickly. "Wait! Pure business, eh? Wait!"

Copperton laughed, and swung out toward the beacon city.

IF you remember, there was a two-year period of tremendous boom in northern Shensi, when the American Oil Company stepped in to exploit the supposed field. Two primitive wells had been working steadily but moderately at Yench'ang. But now the big company sent out all manner of experts and machinery from the States and started to drill wells. Pipelines, railroads, commerce and shipping began to be boomed and were boomed.

However, no further oil was found, and the big company quit. The two primitive wells continued to work moderately; the other and newer wells continued dry; and the great war put the finishing touches to the boom. It was a dead boom.

It had been alive long enough, however, to let Grenham work it to the limit. He quit a year before the American Company quit, and being rather accustomed to booms, he quit with all the money that an active man could concentrate upon, which was no inconsiderable sum. When Grenham got to Shanghai, being the man he was, he sunk his money in various and sundry enterprises and interviewed local authorities of the British concession with the aim of getting something to do in France.

Grenham proved up on his administrative ability before he got to France, and was put in charge of the Chinese workmen, having a knowledge of the tongue. For three years he worked behind the lines, and during those three years various things happened to him. At the end of this period he found himself Lord Marshall, after his native town in Michigan; he found himself a person of weight and importance in the world; and best of all, he found that his investments in China had amassed him a really tremendous fortune. Also he found himself with a face so scarred by a chance dose of shrapnel that he was glad to let his beard grow.

It will be recognized that thus another man had been born into the world, a man whom no soul on earth would have recognized as Grenham of Yench'ang. With the war's end, Lord Marshall found himself possessed of estates in England, a

mighty fortune and a devil of loneliness. This little device drove him home to Michigan, with the general intention of chucking the whole works of nobility and settling down as a lodge-member in his old home town.

However, he discovered that the old home town was sadly changed; his old friends were worse changed; and the little devil was driving at him again. Incredible as it seemed, he found himself homesick for the place where he had made a man of himself and had worked and sweated—homesick for the dirt and desolation and strange gods of Shensi, for the beauty and awfulness of China. Grenham had really suffered while there; and oftentimes it is such suffering that will in later life grip a man's heartstrings to a place.

Lord Marshall started leisurely for China, via Chicago and the coast. He was much interviewed of newspapers, none of whom wormed out of him anything about Grenham. He detested being held up as an American who had become an English lord, and so he kept quiet about it; and things were moving too fast in the big world for the newspapers to ferret out the beginnings of a mere Britisher.

When he got to San Francisco, Lord Marshall settled down at the Palace to see the town. He walked up Grant Street, tried to find a yellow man who spoke the Shensi dialect, and failed miserably. This made him the more homesick for the white loess plains, and as he was returning to the hotel, he made up his mind to book passage on the first liner. Then, and in this mood, he halted in front of a little antique-shop.

There was before him a medley of Venetian and Bohemian glass, electroplated silver called Sheffield for the benefit of those who knew nothing of Sheffield silver plate, trays of old jewelry, a fiddleback chair or two, and so forth. What drew the eye of Lord Marshall was a ring. He went into the store to buy the ring and met Barbara Sullivan.

Within two minutes Grenham had laid aside the brusqueness and "side" which had come to him with a title and a fortune; something in the quiet, deep, womanly eyes of Barbara Sullivan stripped him down to bare man again, and he was glad of it. He trembled when he met her gaze. When he paid for the ring, and their hands touched by chance, he felt a thrill like an electric shock.

He lingered, talking, until the lights went on, and still he lingered.

"See here," he said suddenly, desperate impulse upon him as he laid down his card, "I am—I am not a cad. I don't know your name; I only know that I never in my life met a woman such as you. I'm a stranger here, and desperately sick at heart. I've missed a good deal out of life, perhaps. Will you dine with me, as a friend? If you'll call up the Palace, they'll vouch for me, I fancy."

He felt cold chills as he looked at her across the counter; he felt as though he had done a very foolish thing which would get him a terrific reprimand. To his absolute amazement, and not a little to his sense of humility, her gravely intent eyes lightened abruptly in a smiling merriment.

"I should be very happy," she said simply, without hesitation or false resistance. "My name is Barbara Sullivan. If you will call in an hour—I live in the back room, you see—"

LORD MARSHALL left the shop. Outside he wiped his brow and set off striding up the street at a fierce pace. He felt drunk with sudden and terrible happiness. He walked for an hour in the fog; so far had he forgotten his acquired nobility, that he neglected to dress—never thought of it. But no matter; Barbara Sullivan appeared in plain serge, and suggested the Poodle Dog. She knew that he was a lord, yet seemed oblivious of it.

At the famous restaurant the bearded features of Lord Marshall were recognized, as was the red rosette in his lapel. They delighted to do him honor, as only Frenchmen can—the dinner was more than a feast; it was an event. But Lord Marshall scarce knew what he was eating.

Barbara Sullivan answered his questions frankly: the shop supported her; she was nearer thirty than twenty; she had lived her whole life in this city. Grenham read between the lines that she had been starved for many things. It showed in the very intensity of her womanliness; much self-repression, much denial, which breeds character. And the poised clarity of her deep eyes made the soul ache within him for longing. He knew that he would no longer go down the years alone.

He found no hint of poverty about her. Indeed, her simplicity was obviously a thing of choice, and he liked it. She wore but one jewel, a sapphire brooch at her

throat; and Grenham, knowing something of jewels, knew that his wealth would have been hard put to it to match that sapphire. Incidentally she mentioned her brother. Grenham tucked away the name of Alan Sullivan in his memory; the brother was a business man in the city, he gathered.

"I was going to China by the next steamer," he said, when he was bidding her good night at the shop door. "Now, I shall not go—yet." He was suddenly embarrassed. "Would it be an—an imposition if I were to ask—to-morrow night—"

She drew a deep breath. Her eyes were very steady upon his.

"Do not think that I yield readily to impulse," she said, a slight tremor in the rich softness of her voice. "I do not. You have given me a most delightful evening—and I will say frankly that I am selfish. Yes."

He bowed, the conventional words lost in his throat. He could not be conventional—now.

THE name of Alan Sullivan was famous on the coast. In Sullivan's shop on Sutter Street were the finest Chinese antiques to be had in the world; Alan Sullivan stood in with all the decorators, who sent their patrons to his shop and drew down percentages of the doubled prices. Alan Sullivan had succeeded, for when he guaranteed a painting or a vase to be T'ang, it was certain to be T'ang and nothing else.

Lord Marshall, stick in hand, was received by Alan Sullivan in person. The dealer was a smallish man, sharp-featured, with a tongue that was cynically frank, and he was not in the least servile before his distinguished visitor. The visitor seemed to enjoy it.

After inspecting the shop, Lord Marshall purchased for twelve hundred dollars a necklace and pendant of carven lapis lazuli, Ch'ien Lung period, and requested that a receipt be written for the money, which he paid in cash. Alan Sullivan himself wrote the receipt.

"If you will call at my room in the Palace Hotel to-morrow at three," said Lord Marshall, extending his card, "I may be able to interest you in a business matter, Mr. Sullivan. Your knowledge of Chinese art is really remarkable, and we might be able to turn it to mutual advantage if you so desire."

"I shall be delighted," assented the dealer, with the utmost truth.

That evening Grenham presented the necklace to Barbara Sullivan; and being a man of intuition, and essentially a gentleman, he managed the difficult matter very decently. At all events, he managed it—and this fact caused him a deep inward glow.

Returning to his rooms at the hotel, however, he rummaged in his trunk until he had located an old and worn pocket-book. From this pocketbook he took a folded paper which he opened and laid upon the table. Beside it he laid the receipt which Alan Sullivan had that afternoon written. Then he sat down and studied them.

"By the gods, they're the same," he said softly. "I was fairly sure of the man's face; now I know. Copperton was an assumed name, of course. Copper-ton—"

He sat motionless, his eyes fixed upon vacancy. Before his mental vision appeared that ancient road across a dead country, that winding road, white with loess, which wound beneath the tomb of Huang Ti, between farmless countrysides; and upon that dead path two white men, one of them staggering as he walked, and driving himself forward by will-power.

His fist came down upon the table with jarring force. He made a gesture as though to wipe the white dust out of his eyes again, then laughed bitterly, fiercely. Taking down the receiver of the desk-telephone, he asked for the hotel manager, and spoke to that person for several moments, chiefly as regarded his personal finances.

"This information is confidential," he concluded. "A gentleman will call to-morrow morning and request to know something of me; I wish you to see him personally, and repeat this financial information as I have given it to you. His name is Alan Sullivan. He is not to know that you obtained the information from me. You are at liberty to verify it for yourself at my bank. Do you understand?"

Lord Marshall hung up the receiver and laughed again.

"Alan Sullivan will be here to-morrow afternoon at two-fifty-nine," he said to himself.

He was wrong in this, however. It was exactly three when Sullivan appeared.

LORD MARSHALL showed himself a genial, hospitable soul, if not entirely conventional. He ordered wine, produced cigars, settled the dealer comfortably. Then:

"You've been in China, of course?"

"I spent three years there," returned Sullivan.

"Would you consider going back? I am going to China before long, and—"

"I might," ventured the dealer as the bearded Briton paused. "Of course, my business here is established—"

"Come, Sullivan! I'll be frank with you," said Lord Marshall. "You may know that I'm not attempting to make money; in fact, I expect to spend a great deal in the next few months. You like money?"

The dealer smiled thinly. "Certainly," he responded with some asperity, "—very much."

"Then listen to my proposal. I buy out your business here at your own price, and leave it to be sold by agents for me. You put up the money with me, and I match it with a like sum. We go to China together, and expend this entire sum on the purchase of such antiques as have never been brought out of the country. Think what could be done with such a collection!"

Sullivan's eyes gleamed.

"Hold on, now," he said cautiously. "Your idea is to form a joint company—just the two of us? But I thought you weren't trying to make money."

"I'm not,"—and Lord Marshall smiled genially. "I want a collection of antiques, which you will buy for me as you buy the commercial collection. I figure that the profits on the commercial collection, to term it so, will repay me for my private collection. You comprehend?"

The dealer nodded. Before his eyes blazed such a vision as would have snared any man in his profession. He saw himself turned adrift in China with practically unlimited money, to buy gems of ancient art at his own sweet will; he saw Alan Sullivan returning to the States with priceless possessions, which would sell here for treble their cost, plus import duty. The half-dreamed schemes of years leaped into fruition in his brain. Best of all, he saw much profit to be made—on the side. That private-collection notion was an excellent thing.

"This is a big thing to be sprung in a

hurry," he said slowly. "But I like it, Your Lordship—"

"Never mind that." Lord Marshall waved his hand. "Call me Marshall, my friend."

"Still," said Sullivan warily, "my establishment here is no joke! It would mean—"

"Figure it out," said Lord Marshall, leaning back and pulling at his cigar. "I have only one stipulation to make—if you assent to the scheme."

Sullivan scarcely heard this last. He went to the desk, seized pencil and paper, and began to wonder how high he dared to inventory his shop. At length he turned.

"With assets and all figured in, it'll come, roughly, to a hundred and twenty thousand."

"Pounds?" inquired Lord Marshall indolently.

Sullivan caught his breath. "No—dollars. There may be a difference of five or ten thousand either way—"

"Very well. Call it one twenty-five, even." The Briton rose lazily. "If you say so, I'll write out the check now. It will have gone through by the time we're ready to move. I want to stay here at least a fortnight longer."

Alan Sullivan trembled, and feared lest the movement be seen. He sweated, and feared lest the glistening drops be noted.

"I—I'm on," he said hoarsely. "It's a bargain."

"Ah—I mentioned one stipulation," said Lord Marshall, producing a check-book and then pausing. "The money is to remain in my possession, subject only to my signature. This, you will comprehend, is solely to protect my own interests. You might desire to buy objects which I would not have at any sum—"

"That's a'l right with me," said Alan Sullivan quickly.

"Then we'll get an attorney up here without delay, and arrange things legally."

Lord Marshall stepped to the telephone.

WHEN Alan Sullivan took passage for Nagasaki and China, he was the happiest man in the country. He had sufficient money to reach Hsian Fu, in Shensi, and to start operations there; Lord Marshall would join him with a quarter of a million cash credit to draw upon; and Sullivan, by that time, would have everything in Shensi of an antique nature

marked down for immediate purchase. He was in a dealer's paradise.

Sullivan knew, of course, that Lord Marshall was acquainted with his sister Barbara. If he presumed somewhat upon that acquaintance, such was the nature of the man, and he could not be blamed for it. He sailed two weeks ahead of Lord Marshall, and when, at Shanghai, he received a wireless announcing the marriage of his sister to Lord Marshall, he accounted himself a made man for life.

A long cablegram ordered him to set up an establishment at Yench'ang, leasing a house by the year and engaging servants. This was not so pleasant, for Sullivan much preferred Hsian Fu as a place of residence; but he thought of Lord Marshall's millions, shook hands with himself, and thanked his God that he was a righteous man. Then he went up-country and obeyed his orders.

As the weeks passed, he became uneasy over not hearing. All mail seemed abortive labor. He had made payments on various antiques, whose polite owners were anxious to see the balance of the money; and funds were running low. Sullivan had not heard a word from Lord Marshall since getting that cablegram. Now he began to curse the clause which had left all the money to the sole disposal of Marshall.

"If I'd only kept out a few thousand!" he reflected. "But no—I had to put the whole works into the scheme. And why not? Marshall doubled every cent I put into it, and that gave just so much more capital to work on here—"

Sullivan was growing desperate when young Hammersley came along—another white man, and a young sprig of enthusiasm to boot. Hammersley came straight from Shanghai, or as straight as a man may come, on financial business for the banks; and knowing there was a white man settled here, he looked up Sullivan at once. Such, at least, was his story.

Naturally, Sullivan's first question was about Lord Marshall. It seemed to give the youngster quite a surprise.

"Oh, I say!" he returned, diving into a pocket. "You know that chap, eh?"

"My brother-in-law," returned the dealer.

"'Pon my word! I remember I happened to have a clipping—here it is. No end of a time in Shanghai over the chap; he made his start out here, I believe."

Hammersley gave his host a rather sur-

prisingly clean and legible clipping from *L'Echo de Chine*, then departed for the afternoon. All this took place at tiffin.

THE clipping recounted the reception of Lord Marshall and his wife in Shanghai, and it then went on to trace Lord Marshall back by degrees until it reached a young oil-engineer named Grenham up in Shensi. The name burst upon Sullivan like a thunderclap. Until this instant he had had absolutely no suspicion of anything amiss.

Then his dazed eyes noted, at the end of the article, that Lord and Lady Marshall were sailing within a few days for Singapore and Auckland. Sullivan went limp in his chair. They were not coming here after all!

By degrees he managed to conquer the absolute chaos into which that newspaper clipping had plunged his whole cosmos. His incredulous stupefaction gave place to a keenly aching misery of soul. His dulled brain could grasp but two facts: First, that almost forgotten fool Grenham had come back from the dead and had rooked him of his last dollar; second, he was now broke, abandoned, thrown upon his own resources—which were nil—here in the most desolate part of China!

Gradually it occurred to him that he was now in exactly the same position in which he had placed Grenham some years previously—and in the same place to boot.

Young Hammersley, strange to say, did not return to the house at all, and Sullivan never saw him again; but late in the afternoon he sent up a package by coolie. Sullivan opened the package with trembling hands, for it was from Lord Marshall.

In the package was the receipt which one Thomas Copperton had given J. G. Grenham some years previously, and it was handsomely framed. Sullivan groaned when he saw it. Then his fingers gripped feverishly at a letter which accompanied the framed receipt.

My dear Sullivan, alias Copperton:

You have had a very disagreeable afternoon, I hope. Serves you right.

My intention in San Francisco was to strip you of your last cent, and you fell for it

nicely. But fortunately for yourself, I find that Barbara has retained a lingering affection for you; therefore I have changed my plans.

The contract which was drawn up between us stands good.

At this point Sullivan caught his breath sharply, but only to lose it again as he read onward:

You may buy all the antiques you wish, and upon due presentation of the bills, your drafts will be honored. By referring to your copy of the contract, however, please note that nothing was said about getting the antiques out of China. So I would advise that you go slow about buying.

I have arranged a credit of five thousand gold per annum, to be paid you so long as you reside in Yench'ang. If you stir outside the bounds of Shensi province, you lose the sum. So I would advise that you do not stir.

As you so uprightly remarked to me some time since, I am not a thief. I don't want your money. Ultimately it shall be returned to you. Barbara has no suspicion of anything wrong in your past existence, and I do not intend that she shall have any such suspicion. So I would advise that you do not write her anything disturbing—for your own sake.

We are going around the world, and in two or three years we shall join you in Yench'ang. Until then, you will be a modern and male Valkyr, ringed about with the ring of eternal fires, awaiting the day when I, your rescuer, shall summon you to life again. Extremely poetic thought, what? When I arrive, we shall talk further about getting those antiques out of China. Another clause in the contract will remedy that—at a price.

Pure business, my dear Copperton. Pure business! You made me sweat pretty hard a few years back, and now I'm exacting a little interest on the perspiration. However, you've been very decent to Barbara, and on that account you'll draw dividends—when we come to Yench'ang. Pure business, eh?

Lady Marshall sends her love.

Yours sincerely,

J. G. GRENHAM.

Sullivan's nerveless fingers relaxed. He stared with haggard eyes across the dirty precincts of the city, where the impalpable loess dust drifted in from the Yen Shui Valley, whitening all things. Before his eyes appeared the vision of a desolate, dead and ancient road where two white men walked ever forward amid a dead country.

"Hell!" he uttered miserably. "Hell!"

"IRREGULAR BRETHREN," another of Bedford-Jones' engrossing stories of the tropics, will appear in the next, the August, number of **THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.**

Splitting Even With Mr. Tutt



Holman Day

FOR a long time the hatefulness of his position in the world had been grinding upon Mr. Zephrein Widd's sensitiveness. He was in no way a deep psychologist, and the result of his brooding was a sort of sullen rancor, as if he were doomed to perpetual toothache. He did not attempt to analyze his feelings further than to nurse the constant conviction that he ought to rise up and bat somebody on the head. But he could not make up his mind in regard to the special victim.

He was buck-sawing wood for the galley stove on the deck of the topsail schooner *Eggemoggin*. He shielded himself as much as possible behind the foresail; it was carelessly crumpled in the lazy-jacks and afforded him considerable protection from the gaze of the wharf loungers. Every time the schooner had been tied up at Portland, taking on its packet freight, Mr. Widd had found the stares and the comments of the wharf loungers most annoying. But nobody seemed to know just who he was, and the shield of anonymity helped quite measurably in the case, he felt.

"Here's the old hooker. Here she is!" called somebody on the wharf in loud tones. "This way!"

There were plenty of other vessels in the dock, but Mr. Widd's sore spirit promptly

A WILD life as cook aboard a schooner with a crew of women upset Mr. Widd's nerves so that subsequent events ashore were even wilder—and more joyful to the reader.

translated this announcement as reference to the *Eggemoggin*. He peered over the foresail and found that his guess was correct. Quite a little crowd was lined along the stringpiece.

"And that must be the chap with the funny name," observed a man. "What does the paper say his name is?"

Another man consulted a newspaper. "Zephrein Widd," he announced for all to hear. "Some name!"

Mr. Widd ducked down. His first shocked and amazed impulse was to hide away.

"Well, he sure must have some angel disposition to go with that name," said another commentator. "After that puff in the paper, it's a wonder half the women of the city aint down here, trying to hire him for kitchen help."

Mr. Widd popped up. He tucked his dirty canvas apron under his "galluses" and came from his retreat. He had a stick of stovewood in each hand.

"By the horn-gilled wimpus, you want to leave over cackling about *me*," he shouted, turning his convulsed face up at them.

"If you're starting in to shut the mouths of this whole city, to say nothing of other

sections, you wont have much time left for making pies and doughnuts," said the man who held the newspaper. "Haven't you seen this piece about you?"

"There aint no piece about me."

"Here's about half a column, with a big heading and a picture of you and the schooner and the rest of the crew," declared the informant. "They're sly operators, these snap-shotters!"

MR. WIDD'S face expressed such blank unbelief that the man wadded the newspaper and tossed it onto the schooner's deck. The skeptic laid down his stovewood and examined the newspaper.

There were the headings! "An Amazon Crew Captained by a Woman. Captain's Husband Is Cook and Only Man Aboard." There were the pictures! There was Mr. Widd, caught in the act of hanging out dish-towels.

Mr. Widd galloped aft, clutching the newspaper, and slammed into the cabin by way of the "coach-house" door.

Four strapping women were finishing up the breakfast that Mr. Widd had carried in from the galley a half-hour before.

He exercised the liberty of a husband, instead of being controlled by the ship-board discipline that should govern the actions of a mere cook: he crowded the paper under the nose of one of the women and beat the flat of his hand on the sheet. He stuttered unintelligibly.

She grabbed the paper and pushed him away. She read the item aloud. It was to the effect that the coastwise packet schooner *Eggemoggin* was captained and "manned" by women—namely: Mrs. Actilla Widd, Miss Delora Widd, sister-in-law, and Misses Tryphena and Tryphosa Tutt, sisters of the Captain. The item stated that the women had been successfully operating the schooner ever since the war had made men scarce and freights high and profitable. It stated, also, that these women had become so much interested in their work that they proposed to keep on after the war and show any sailor-man that the modern woman could beat him on his own plane of activity. The writer threw in a nice little compliment.

"That's what I call an A-1, shipshape and seamanlike item," declared Mrs. Widd, pulling the peak of her cap down over one eye. "It's all so, girls!"

"We'll go up and buy a lot of papers," said Miss Delora.

"But look what the condemned, inkynosed, lying kodobabus has put in about me!" clamored Mr. Widd. "I have been feeling something in the air; it has been brooding; it has—"

"The item only makes a little good-natured fun of your cooking and says that we tie you up by the thumbs and apply the cat-o'-nine-tails when you let your doughnuts soak fat," said Mrs. Widd serenely. "That's only a joke to help spice up the item. It makes it more shipshape."

"Certainly!" chorused the others.

Mr. Widd glared into the amiable faces of this family group. He banged his fist on the table and made the dishes dance. "I have managed to drag along so far and do the pot-walloping on this schooner, and so long as everybody didn't know I was making a dummed fool of myself, I could stand it. A joke, is it, the way I'm held up before the world?"

"Aren't you making yourself very important all of a sudden?" inquired Miss Tryphosa Tutt, wrinkling her nose after what had been her habit in the school-room. "What does the world care?"

"Because your nose has been stuck into a book all your life makes you think that only some cussed college perfessor or dude can have his heart made sore and his reppytation smashed by a newspaper," snarled Mr. Widd. "I have got a reppytation of my own with men who really amount to something—me that has bred and trotted such hosses as Carpenter Boy, Rollicking Kate and—"

"Yes, and fooled away your money and mortgaged your farm," blazed his wife. "And if it hadn't been for my brother—"

"If it hadn't been for your brother, I would never have been jammed aboard this old chopping-tray that's called a schooner. I had to knuckle down, didn't I, or he would have foreclosed that mortgage, and the whole of you know how the condemned old hyena twisted me in money matters till I've paid him more interest than the whole debt was, and he's still—"

HE could no longer stem the flood of protest from the family. Even his own sister joined the sisters of his creditor. "Zeph," she declared, "you needed to be put in some place where you'd be kept away from those mis'able hoss-trotting thieves, and this is just the place for you. You have had your fifth share of profits, and you aint wasting it."

"You bet he aint," stated Mrs. Widd grimly. "That mortgage will be cleaned up first!"

"You have tucked away money enough of yours and mine to settle the mortgage," insisted Mr. Widd. "I aint no seafaring man, and I aint no ding-basted old kitchen mop, neither! I want to get back to our farm and live happy."

"Do you dare to talk of going back to a farm when we're cleaning up what we are on every trip on freight-money?" demanded Captain Actilla hotly.

"I'm only a pack-hoss for that brother of yours—that's what it all amounts to. Paying him interest, paying him mortgage-money, paying him charter-money on this old tin dipper! I tell ye, she aint safe to travel in," cried Mr. Widd, working up to a frenzy of protest. "Now, that the fall blows are coming along, we're taking more desp'r't chances than a man holding himself out from the top of a ladder by the seat of his pants."

"Please employ more choice language in the presence of ladies," said ex-School-ma'am Tryphosa.

"I didn't suppose you called yourselves ladies any more," retorted Mr. Widd, pointing to the newspaper. "Seeing the pride you take in being called sailors, it's a wonder you aint parading out there before the world, wearing britches and hitching of 'em up, and chawing tobacker."

"We have accepted the responsibilities of men, but we refuse to accept their vices," replied Miss Tryphosa tartly.

"Zephrin," commanded Captain Actilla, interrupting her husband in his fresh outburst, "pick up your dishes and take 'em to the galley. You have your work to do, and we have ours. There's a lot more freight to come aboard." She began to pull on heavy gloves, and the rest of the crew followed suit.

"I'm all done," declared Mr. Widd. "You can hang onto that money you have hid away. Give that old hyampus of a brother all of it. I'm going where I wont have to face the world, after what has been put into the paper about me."

Mrs. Widd set her gloved knuckles on the table and leaned toward him.

"Widd, I am the master of this vessel. You are articted as cook. If you leave me in this port, it is desertion, and I'll report you to the shipping commissioner and have you jailed. I'm willing to be as patient and as lenient as possible with a husband,

but confound me," she declared with real master-mariner manner, "if I'll allow a cook to talk back to me, either in port or on the high seas! If you leave, it's desertion; if you don't get busy with those dishes, it's mutiny."

They marched out, and Mr. Widd soon heard the popping of the gasoline winch which handled their heavier burdens.

"They are so cussed puffed up that they wont even listen to a warning about this old tub," he muttered. "My old Aunt Roxy could crochet a schooner that would be safer than this one is—but old Tully Tutt don't give a hoot about our lives if he can keep us humping so as to pay him his charter-money. We're going to pieces some day in a blow, surer'n hell's no place for celluloid collars."

He went up a few steps of the companionway and took a peep over the edge of the slide hatch. The crowd was absorbed in the labors of the husky women. Mr. Widd secured the dishes and slunk down the alley through the waist and hid himself in the galley. He was in no way reconciled to remaining on board, but at any rate, the galley was a refuge until he could get hold of some money or could think up a plan for himself. Every now and then he crawled on his hands and knees into the forepeak, fumbled in the darkness and "sooped" from a bottle. "If it wasn't for this pineapple rum to take my mind off'm myself," he mumbled, "I don't know but what I'd give up complete. As it is, I reckon I'll eat about a pound of raw steak and drink a pint of this as soon as we dock in Tutt's Cove this trip. I'm getting close to the point where I'm going to talk to him!"

OCCASIONALLY Mr. Widd felt like going out and talking to the crowd when he heard his name bandied about with considerable hilarity. But he forbore. "I'm getting down to a more realizing sense of the man I'm going to center on for what has been happening to me. I shall need a lot of language. I'm going to store it up." Therefore, in that spirit, he became very taciturn in his association with the captain and the crew. He ate his meals in the galley. "I have been twitted about being a cook instead of a husband," he growled. "So I'll 'tend right to cooking and keep my place where I belong!"

"You're making a fool of yourself," snapped his wife.

"I know that—generally speaking and on all points," he agreed. "So there aint no chance for further argument."

That evening, while he was clearing away the dishes, the women sat around the table, marking the write-up of the *Eggemoggin* and wrapping the newspapers for mailing to their friends and acquaintances. Mr. Widd ground his teeth, but in his new resolve, he was silent. "You don't get nowhere talking against four women. And I shall need all the language I can store up," he kept reminding himself.

So, when she had been loaded, hold and deck, with packet freight, the old schooner was warped out of the dock, her sails were hoisted by the gasoline winch, and off to the eastward she butted her slow way with blunt bows thrashing the waves.

The sea always made Mr. Widd lonesome. He had no sort of favor for the open wastes of water. He lighted his pipe and went aft and sat on the deck in the lee of the windward rail, joining the family.

Miss Tryphosa was complaining about the size of the pestiferous rats at the wharf and was hoping that none had been able to sneak aboard. "I saw one dead rodent that was nigh as large as a cat," she declared. "I was just casting off the stern line."

"Let me ask you!" broke in Mr. Widd, showing anxiety. "Did you spit three times when you saw that dead rat?"

"Why, I most certainly did no such vulgar thing!"

"Then I'll bet you have Jonahed us."

"What do you mean by any such nonsense as that?"

"I aint no seafaring character, and I don't take much of any interest in seafaring matters, but when a man is obliged to get into any kind of a thing where there is resk involved, it behooves him to find out about the hoodoos connected. When I was in the hoss-business, I wasn't careful enough, and see what happened! So I have taken pains to listen to old sea captains, here and there, lately, and they all say that to see a big dead rat, when you're casting off, and not spit three times, is about the next thing to committing suicide. Furthermore I don't like the looks of them slaty clouds. And I wish old Tully Tutt had to ride from here all the way to Tutt's Cove astraddle of that bowsprit. In that case I'd advise you to take the outside passage, where the waves are good and big," he remarked to Captain Actilla.

SHE was at the wheel. "I don't need that advice. I'm going outside, anyway. With the wind as it is, I'd have to beat through Lumbo's Narrows."

"I hate to be pulling and hauling on ropes all the time," said Miss Widd. "That's what tacking through the narrows would mean."

"It may be all right to go outside in the summer, even in this old skimmer," said Mr. Widd. "But it's better to do a little extra pulling and hauling rather than a whole lot of drowning. Dim-baste it, I wont agree to going outside!"

"What have you got to say about where and how I shall navigate?" asked Captain Actilla. "And there's no wind to speak of, nor signs of any. Do any of you girls feel that there's any danger?"

"Certainly not!" she was assured. The prospect of making long reaches, without starting tack or sheet, appealed to them after the toil of loading freight.

"Starting off hoodooed like we did, and now taking every chance that's mentioned by old Nicodemus except trying to jump her over Brown Cow Ledge!" squalled Mr. Widd. "That's what comes of letting a woman into anything. Anything they get into, they overdo it. But you have heard my warning. Whatever happens, don't ask me for sympathy."

"And you needn't think that I'll bother to ask you for any help, either, Mr. Widd," retorted Captain Actilla with a fine air of self-reliance. "The girls and I know our business when it comes to sailing a schooner."

But there is one thing no schooner will do—it wont sail without wind. Soon after midday one of those familiar autumn calms fell upon the sea, and the *Eggemoggin* lost headway. There was "an old sea" running, big, slow, lazy waves were marching toward shore from the disturbance that had been kicked up somewhere by a blow. The ancient craft fell into the trough of the sea, broadside to the waves, and gave itself up to be rocked.

"This calm is a weather-breeder, and when the wind does come, it will be a ring-tailed snorter," predicted Mr. Widd dolefully. "That hoodoo is working!"

"If you don't keep that everlasting gloomy clack quiet, I shall be tempted to stuff a gob of oakum into your mouth and calk the leak in your face," said the captain.

"It's getting onto the nerves of all of us," declared Miss Tryphena Tutt.

RIGHT soon something profoundly more disturbing got onto their nerves. Triggled in the waist of the schooner was a huge cylindrical tank filled with gasoline. Three smaller tanks flanked it. When the big tank had been triggled by the crew, their lack of skill or feminine carelessness had improperly provided against any such rolling as the schooner was getting on the bosom of the deep. The big tank went lumbering loose.

"Good gracious and land o' Goshen!" shrieked Captain Actilla. "Get forward there, the whole of you. Trig it! Use anything you can lay hands to!"

The big tank bumped the bulwark and rolled slowly back across the deck while the three women were hastening forward, squealing suggestions to each other.

Mr. Widd rose and took a look over the house and sat down again.

"Get forward there and help," commanded the Captain. "Stir your boots!"

"Nothing doing!" stated Mr. Widd. "You bragged that you wouldn't need any help from me—and furthermore, I'm the cook."

"I'll cook you," cried the frantic wife. She pulled a belaying-pin from the rack and chased Mr. Widd forward. "This is a time when we've all got to pitch in!"

The tank yawed a little on its next trip across the deck and set loose the smaller tanks. Those frolicked in more lively fashion as the schooner rolled. It was something like a grotesque imitation of a cat playing with her kittens—that big tank and the little ones. The smaller tanks complicated the problem. One did not know which way they would roll next. They played about the large tank in such a fashion as to make it dangerous to approach the big fellow with trigs. In a few moments the women were entirely occupied in dodging the frisky little fellows. Mr. Widd climbed on top of the galley.

"Dad rat your cowardly pelt!" screeched his wife. "Come down here!"

"If you think I'm coming down there and let that tank play rolling-pin over me, you've got another guess coming," returned Mr. Widd with equal violence. "Come up out of there, the whole of you."

"We must make it stop rolling, you fool!" wailed the distracted Captain, man-aging to dodge one of the little tanks while she tossed a plank under the big one. The plank was immediately ground into splinters.

"How do you think you're going to stop it?" demanded Mr. Widd. "By patting it and saying 'Pussy, pussy'? You're all goners if ye don't come out of there."

AFTER a few moments they did come out, for panic seized on them. The small tanks rolled every which way, like pursuing animals. The feminine temperament was daunted as it would have been by real beasts of prey. The Captain and crew retreated to the quarter-deck and screamed.

Sometimes the big tank bumped the bulwark lightly, and then, getting extra impetus from a heavier surge, banged against the timbers with a force that shook the schooner from stem to stern.

Mr. Widd put hollowed hands to his mouth and addressed the quarter-deck group. "You don't have to spit three times when you see a dead rat, hey? It's too vulgar when it's a matter of saving your life, hey? I say, dod-belter a woman for not knowing that she hadn't ought to undertake anything more complicated than kicking an oven door shet! Every woman in the United States ought to be chained by one leg to the kitchen table and be made to stay where she belongs. Look at the scrape we're in! Want to run everything, hey? Most of 'em can't even run an apple-parer without having a man explain by a diagram." He was working himself into fury to which sick fear added virulence. "There aint nobody to depend on in this world but a man when there's things to be done. You'd better be singing 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' the whole caboodle of ye! That tank is a-going to bust the daylight out of this old Tully Tutt timdinket surer'n Tophet! Call it a sailing vessel!" he railed shrilly. "It aint fit to sail across a sasser of Porty Reek merlasses in January; it would sink!"

"Oh, Zeph—Zeph dear!" pleaded Mrs. Widd. "Isn't there something you can do? You're a man! Isn't there something?"

"Yah-h-h! Now ye're coming to it, hey? Calling on a man!"

"Yes, we are!"

Mr. Widd was suddenly exalted in his own estimation by the pride which he had whipped up regarding general masculine efficiency; also he was frenziedly afraid for his own life in that exigency. Emotions of that sort drive men to dangerous deeds. He stood at the edge of the galley-roof and surveyed the activity of the tanks.

"And this is what women have driv' me to!"—in sour soliloquy. "To go and play 'tag—you're it' with them devilnation, rampaging old iron beecos! And I don't have no more idea of how to stop 'em than a black duck knows how to cipher sums in arithmetic."

His eyes fell on a couple of stout, spare spars, stowed forward of the foremast. The wild idea, in default of a more sensible plan, came to him that if he were to lay those spars parallel, with ends on the bulwark and sloping to the deck, the crazy tank might roll itself up that railway and plunge overboard.

By dint of mighty wrestling and shuffling and dodging, and watching his chance, he did manage to place the spars. The rolling tank essayed the runway several times but went only a few feet up the incline. Then one of the big waves hurled the old schooner over to lee. The tank rolled almost to the top of the bulwark! One of the spars snapped in twain; the end of the tank dropped to the deck; the iron cylinder teetered for a moment; and another lift of the vessel set it squarely on its flat end. Its antics were ended.

FOR a moment Mr. Widd was fairly paralyzed by this wholly unexpected trick of pure, lucky chance. Then he picked up half of the broken spar and allowed the small tanks to run upon it, and he easily upended them. The women came rushing to him while he was at this task. When he had finished, they beat applauding hands upon his back; they tried to hug him and to kiss him.

He pushed them away and stood with folded arms and gazed at them with frowning condescension. "Now you see for yourselves what a man's brain-work will do!"

"Yes, yes!" said Captain Actilla hysterically. "And the tank didn't get lost overboard after all! Wasn't it lucky that—"

"Luck, your old Aunt Huldy's black cat!" scoffed Mr. Widd. "I took careful note of how there was a crack in one of them spars and I set it so as it would drop one end of that tank. I figgered it out! A man doesn't lose his head like a woman does." He was trembling in all his frame, and he kept his arms tightly folded so that he might not betray himself. After all that excitement he was having a flare-back of fear. "I serve notice on you and the whole world that I'll never trust my life

to women again, or to this damblasted old branmash dipper that's owned by Tully Tutt. And you listen to me! I'm going to tell Tully Tutt where he can get off after this, as far as I'm concerned. It'll be worth listening to."

"Zeph, after your noble—" his wife started to plead.

He sliced the air with a protesting hand. "I don't want a word from nobody after this. I'm going to do the talking. After this I'm going to run my own business. I serve notice on one and all!"

He disappeared into the galley, and when they had returned to the quarter-deck, he crawled into the forepeak. "Now that I've got my spirit tuned up to note G, and to reg'lar concert-pitch," he informed himself, "I'm going to depend on moral courage and this pineapple rum to keep it there."

There was a promising brush of wind on the slick of the waves, and Captain Actilla took the wheel.

"But he wont dare to talk up to Brother Tully, will he?" inquired Miss Tryphosa skeptically, continuing the family council.

"Cat's foot! Of course he wont," returned the wife. "If you don't know Zeph Widd better than that, you'd do well to get acquainted with him, like I have. He'll keep right on aboard this schooner. It's plain that we do need one man for special jobs, and I'll see to it that he stays here."

WHEN the *Eggmoggin* was at last tied up at Tutt's wharf, beside Tutt's general store in Tutt's Cove, Mr. Widd emerged from the forepeak, after a conference with his courage-builder.

Captain Actilla, from the quarter-deck, surveyed him with considerable astonishment. He was dressed up, stiff collar, hard hat and butterfly bow, and carried a little valise in one hand and a belaying pin in the other.

"Where in the name of Sancho are you going?" she demanded.

"I have already served notice on ye! What do you need—a written one, thirty days?"

Mr. Widd was displaying unwonted and discomposing independence. He brushed past her and leaped upon the wharf, paying no attention to her protests. He made for the door of Tutt's big store. His wife followed him.

Mr. Tully Tutt had two offices at the rear of the store; one was labeled "Pri-

vate," the other, "First Selectman." When Mr. Widd pounded with great force on the counter of the store and bellowed "Come out, you old woodchuck!" Mr. Tutt came out of the office marked "Private," followed by a man who had the unmistakable demeanor of the borrower. Mr. Widd recognized the expression promptly; he had often worn it in Mr. Tutt's chilling presence.

"Dragging your old hoss-radish grater over another poor cuss' pelt, hey?" shouted Mr. Widd.

"Zephrin, you shall not make a spectacle of yourself and insult my brother in public," declared Mrs. Widd furiously.

"That gasoline tank was a dangerous proposition, but it wasn't half as dangerous as I am this minute when I have kicked loose all trigs, broke all lashings and am now rolling loose and free!" Again he pounded the belaying pin on the counter.

And continuing to pound with the pin, booming out a tattoo that brought the villagers to the scene, shouting at the top of his voice, Mr. Widd made his declaration of independence. In it he summarized what had been happening to him, putting the indignity of that newspaper write-up even above the dangers of the deep and the risks of Mr. Tutt's old schooner. Mr. Widd also gave a brief biography of Mr. Tutt, with special reference to that gentleman's financial operations, adding a general personal estimate of character. Mr. Tutt and Mrs. Widd advanced to him several times, but Mr. Widd leaped up and down and swung the belaying pin in such menacing fashion that they did not dare lay hands on him. He gave every appearance of a man who had gone completely and wildly insane!

AFTER a time his voice cracked and speech failed him, but he still had more emotions to express in regard to Mr. Tutt.

He raced out of the store. Across the street was "Tutt Block," a brick building tenanted by various secret societies. In a niche in the front of the block was a marble statue of Mr. Tully Tutt, standing with one foot advanced, head held high and exhibiting a marble plug hat in the crook of the elbow.

Mr. Widd picked up stones and pelted the statue as long as he could find ammunition ready at hand. Then he threw the belaying pin as a parting shot and started

off up the middle of the street, waving the little valise over his head.

He secreted himself in a horse-stall at the village tavern and conferred with a bottle that was in the valise. "If you can act out just as good in soothing the feelings of mortal man as you do in putting an edge on moral courage, then it's funny there aint been more pomes written about pineapple rum," he croaked. "Now, what will I do next?"

Mr. Widd was not obliged to rack his brains on that score. The question of his next movements was very effectively answered for him.

Village Constables Perrigo and Joy stepped into the stall and grabbed him.

"Say, look a here, gents," protested Mr. Widd. "I admit to being tea-ed up just a crumb, but it's all in the way of my private business. I aint drunk, and you know it!"

"Oh, nobody is claiming that you're specially licked up, Zeph," said Constable Joy. "Your wife has made formal complaint on other matters to the first selectman, and the first selectman has ordered you took into custody and brought before the board of selectmen and have Doc Tutt pass jedgment on ye!"

"Jedgment for what?" demanded the amazed prisoner.

"It's claimed you have gone crazy."

"I aint crazy, but by the jeehoofered jeesicks, I *will* go crazy if that Tutt family don't leave go of me. I tell you—"

"Now, there aint nothing to be gained by having a joint debate in this hoss-stall," declared Constable Perrigo. "Just come along all sooavable and let them that's higher in authority settle the thing."

If by "sooavable" Constable Perrigo counseled a nonbelligerent mood, it was immediately plain that Mr. Widd either did not understand or else disdained to be amenable. He fought with the constables all the way down the street, after they had dragged him from the tavern premises. He was raving and frothing when he was haled into the solemn presence of the three selectmen in Tutt's store. During his seafaring experience he had picked up considerable language to go with his regular line of horse-trotting profanity, and the combination provided something that, as Uncle Jule Beals averred, in an aside, "would be li'ble to bust up a Sunday-school picnic if a little pillyloo bird sat in a tree and twittered it overhead."

DOCTOR JABEZ TUTT, presenting the medical viewpoint, gravely informed Brother Tully Tutt and the other selectmen that Mr. Widd was dangerously insane, beyond all question.

Under those circumstances there was only one thing for the board to do, under the law made and provided, "as much as we dislike to do it," supplemented Selectman Tutt mournfully. Mr. Widd must be held in restraint, and later, unless he should recover from this dementia, must be regularly, on petition by relatives, committed to the State asylum for the insane.

In that unspeakable crisis, Mr. Widd found his emotions pulled in two different directions: he knew that he ought to calm down and show his assembled townsmen by a sane demeanor that something was being put over on him; on the other hand, his stronger temptation was to break loose, kill off a few relatives and escape punishment on the plea that he had been officially declared a lunatic.

"I serve warning on one and all that you're making a dangerous man out of me! For the love of Pedro, Actilla, why aint you stopping this plot?"

But he found no compassion in that quarter. "Zephrein, it's a kindness to have you taken care of until you're back in your right senses again."

"By the jumping blue Peter, if this thing keeps on, I'll be down on my hands and knees, running around and barking, and trying to bite somebody."

"When a patient admits that his mania is dangerous, the public can scarcely be blamed for taking measures to protect itself," stated Doctor Tutt.

"You're all crazy but me—the whole Tutt family! You're all in cahoots."

"If you haven't lost your mind, it will be easy enough for you to show me," stated Captain Actilla.

"Yes, by going back and galley-walloping aboard that jeembingoed old schooner. I suppose, with everybody in the United States reading pieces about me and pointing their fingers and laughing!"

"When a man threatens to throw up a business proposition like ours, he shows he is crazy," she insisted. "I don't propose to have you roaming around loose and getting into trouble. If you don't come back on the schooner, where I can keep my eye on you, I shall let the law take its course. Pick your choice!"

"Choice!" bleated Mr. Widd. "There

aint no more choice to that than there is between hell and hackenny. Let me get to a lawyer! I'm going to sue for slander and damages, and I'll have a lot of Tutts and editors in jail where they belong." He glared at the bystanders in the store. "Aint there one single friend left to me in this town?"

"We're all friends—friends and relatives," stated Selectman Tutt. "And that's why we're taking good care of you. Probably by to-morrow you'll be all right. And the sea air will do you good when you are back on board the schooner. I announce to all in hearing that I harbor no resentment, Zephrein. You're to be pitied, that's all!"

"A blasted nice mess of pity I am having handed me. Condemn it, by going back and shaming myself before the public on board that schooner, I'm proving out that I'm crazy instead of it being twitchy-versy! And any fair man will say so."

"We'll not thresh out this distressing case any longer at this time," stated the first selectman. "All the legal points have been observed. Probably a nice sound sleep will do the patient good. Is that your opinion, Doctor?"

"Certainly."

"The poor-farm house is the quietest place in the village. Constables, convey the patient there and put him to bed."

"I'll inform you that that place wont be quiet about ten seconds after I've landed there! I'll pick up the danged old house and heave it into the Cove."

"Constables, you will take measures to keep the patient from doing any damage to town property," said the selectman. "His actions and his threats have given you full warning."

"Right you are," said Mr. Perrigo. "Now, Widd, do you want to scuffle all the way up the street, or will you go quiet?"

That was another option that was just as hateful as Captain Actilla's had been!

"Do you mean to tell me that a free American citizen aint going to be given the chance to show that his brains is just as solid as Dan'el Webster's ever was?" demanded the victim.

"You heard what your wife said," stated Selectman Tutt coldly. "I say the same. The moment I see you back on board the schooner, where you belong, I'll call the town officers together, and you will be declared sane."

"By getting onto your job, you will

prove that you are safe to run at large," agreed one of the selectmen.

"I can see all plain that you owe him money, too. Well, I don't give in one tot or tittle! I'm protesting this case all the way from snout to crupper!" He pointed to a roll of new clothes-line. "You'd better cut off some of that and tie me up. I wont agree to be responsible for what may happen if you don't."

"Well," said Constable Joy, who had been fondling the puffiness under one eye, "I've always made it a rule to give a gent what he asks for when it aint no special output to me. Shall I borrow some of that rope, Selectman Tutt?"

"Take all you need."

MR. WIDD consistently entered further protests by getting in a few vicious kicks during his struggle with the constables. Then they loaded him into a beach-wagon and conveyed him to the poor-farm.

Keeper Waite surveyed the raging captive dubiously. "I don't propose to set up all night and dry-nuss Zeph Widd when he's in that state of mind," he declared. "I'm filling the silo, and I need all my sleep."

"You're right," stated the incensed Mr. Joy. "And Seth and I have got our day jobs, and we don't feel called on to be wild-animal trainers nights. There are plenty of saplings on that woodpile. Let's build a cage for him."

Therefore they built a cage in one corner of a room in a small, remote building that had once served as a pesthouse. Keeper Waite selected that isolated location so that he might be sure that his sleep would not be disturbed by any uproar that Mr. Widd's surcharged feelings let forth.

After Mr. Widd had been caged, Mr. Waite reached through the bars and cut the ropes, not bothering to remove them from the cage. And in the still watches of the night, Mr. Widd employed those ropes in very ingenious fashion. He tied two loops around upright saplings. There were short lengths of wood left when the saplings had been sawed into suitable lengths for bars. With two billets of that wood Mr. Widd twisted the loops of rope after the principle of tightening up a buck-saw. When he had twisted the rope as much as his strength could avail, he set the billets crosswise across the saplings and the loops were held taut. The green

saplings were pulled into curves sufficient to allow Mr. Widd to squeeze through. Then he kicked out the glass, frame and all, from one of the windows and went away into the night.

Mr. Widd's plans were very chaotic, and he admitted that much to himself as he cogitated. But there was one idea that was taking form, and he felt that he needed to retire to some solitude where he could meditate. Therefore he went into the woods and hid himself in an old sugar camp whose location was known to him.

BY the next afternoon Widd had arrived at a pretty complete understanding with himself. In the first place he was sure that Selectman Tully Tutt owed to Zephryn Widd, victim, a very considerable debt which must be settled if Mr. Widd were to enjoy peace of mind again. But in order to carry out the plan of settlement which Mr. Widd insisted must be no mere cheap, sneaking, petty retaliation but done on a scale commensurate with what had been done to him in the public eye, there was considerable work cut out for the retaliator.

"There's the main idea," mused Mr. Widd. "It's a big one, and I aint ashamed of it. It's a man's-size idea! It settles a whole lot of things all in one grand wallop. But blast it, I haven't got no tools nor assets!"

A little later his moody meditation was jarred by the bang of a shotgun near by. He peered out of the window. He saw a young fellow, whom he promptly recognized as Doctor Tutt's son, stuffing a dead gray squirrel into a game-bag.

"There's one of the devilish tribe, and I'll use him for first asset," declared Mr. Widd, and he hurried out of the camp, stalking the hunter.

When the youth turned at sound of an incautious footstep, Mr. Widd was only a few feet away, and promptly crouched low on his haunches, doubled his fist, licked it and rubbed it over his head, in grotesque imitation of a cat attending to its toilet.

"I'm a dangerous animile, and you know what's the matter with me, don't you?"

"Yes," squeaked the young fellow, dreadfully scared.

"If you lay down that gun and the shells and hiper your boots, I vow and declare that I wont harm a hair of your head. But if you cross a crazy man, you know what always happens."

The youth was too much frightened to weigh the alternative hazard of surrendering a weapon to a lunatic. His sole desire was to obey orders. He dropped the gun, threw off the belt of shells and ran.

"T'other way!" bawled Mr. Widd. "Don't you show up in the village for an hour."

The boy turned and hurried into the woods.

"Now," said Mr. Widd, "having got a-holt of one end of the thread, we'll begin and unwind the plot."

WHEN Mr. Widd walked down the main street with the gun on his shoulder, the citizens stepped out of his path.

"There's nothing going to happen but what is all genteel and polite, provided I aint crossed," he repeatedly called to this one and that.

He was headed toward Tutt's store, and the villagers followed him.

They crowded at the door when he went in and faced his brother-in-law.

"Selectman Tutt, this aint what you seem to think it is on my part. I should hate to get into State prison for shooting a critter like you. But I propose to show this village that I aint crazy enough to get into your clutches again, and this gun is simply my personal guarantee to my own self. You mind *your* manners, and I'll mind *mine*! Did I understand you to say yesterday that if you saw me back aboard that schooner where I belong, that you'd call off all this loony-man business?"

"Yes," faltered the selectman.

"Say it loud, so that all in hearing can be witnesses."

Mr. Tutt declared himself without reservation.

"You'll see me back there in good time and season," said Mr. Widd. "That shows all concerned that I can meet you halfway on a good thing. But I must say that just at present my nerves have been considerably shaken up by what has been happening to me. I'm going away and relax a little. But I happen to be a little cramped financially. So you'll kindly hand me twenty-five dollars out of your wallet, and I'll fix everything up when Actilla and I settle the mortgage—and I reckon that will be done mighty soon."

Mr. Tutt handed over the money and showed great relief.

"You seem to be glad to do it," said Mr. Widd amiably. "I never saw you show that spirit before. I wouldn't wonder a mite if you and me was going to get along a whole lot better after this—and that's the way it ought to be in a family."

He started for the door.

"But aren't you going to Actilla now?" asked the selectman.

"I can't cook with my nerves in the state they are. And I want to let her alone to think over a few things. The family better get together and talk it all over general so as to be prepared to give me a square deal when I show up again. I aint threatening, nor nothing like that! But I'll say this much! I'm going off outlawing a little. Sha'n't do anything despr'it or especially wrong, of course. But after outlawing it around a few days, I shall probably come back in a different frame of mind from what I have been in for some time past. Family take warning!"

HE marched out of the store and up the street and over the brow of the hill, and not even Keeper Waite gainsaid him when he passed the poorhouse.

When the *Eggemoggin* had finished discharging and was ready to start back to Portland, Mr. Widd had not shown up, either by the front way or the back way. On that particular day he was chewing a straw and discussing horse topics in general at the autumn fair of the Vienna Center Gents' Driving Association. And he also found time to get in some talk on a matter that was entirely dissociated from horses.

To Zenas Briggs, Joash Timmons and Peter Blish he told a story after the four of them had barred themselves into a box stall. They were friends of long standing, tried and true, horsemen all.

"The boble-whooped old hellion!" gasped Mr. Timmons. "And you haven't put anything over on him as yet to pay for it?"

"Not yet, but I'm all ready to harness in and drive a heat that will make the Atlantic Ocean boil over down in the region of Tutt's Cove," declared Mr. Widd, showing his teeth in the gloom of the stall. "You listen!"

"But good Hosea!" objected Blish, after a time. "We aint seafaring men."

"Neither am I," admitted Mr. Widd. "But I know how to get the sails up, with

you three to help, and as for taking 'em down again, somebody else can do all the worrying about that. As hossmen, I ask and beg of you not to go back on me. I wouldn't no more confide this thing to water-front men than I'd rock and sing sculpins to sleep in my arms."

"But how are you guaranteeing that them women wont ketch us at it?" demanded Mr. Briggs. "I'd rather face wildcats than women."

"I never thought I'd admit that the piece that was put into the newspaper to scandalize and disgrace me would prove to be a good investment, gents. But it has given me a line on them females' natures that I never would have got any way else. You leave it all to me!" Again he pleaded.

After a time he succeeded in getting them to admit that there would be considerable "zip" to the adventure, and men who have driven trotting horses do have a taste for excitement. And after their interest had been stirred, it was not hard to win them over to the aid of a brother in distress.

WHEN the conspirators arrived in Portland, Mr. Widd put to the test his knowledge of "female nature" as it had been revealed to him by that publicity incident. Mr. Blish, who was by nature considerable of a reckless character, assisted; he had Captain Actilla Widd called to the telephone in the packet-freight office.

"This is the studio of the official Government photographer," stated Mr. Blish in the most pompous tone he could muster. He gave a name and a number of a modest harness-shop on Middle Street. Then he informed Captain Actilla that a photograph of herself and her crew had been demanded by the Government for a book which was to show the noble part that women had played in the war, and said that their presence was required at once at the studio.

"What did she say?" eagerly demanded Mr. Widd when Mr. Blish came out of the telephone booth.

"She said they'd be there in a jiffy, just as soon as they got themselves titivated up a little."

"Con-ding it, I knowed I could fetch 'em with that. It has got into their blood, this being before the public," raged Mr. Widd.

The *Eggmoggin* was left to take care of itself, as Mr. Widd soon found out; there was no need of a watcher in broad daylight. Her departure, captained by Mr. Widd, excited no comment; the wharf loungers knew the captain's husband only too well. He casually informed the packet-freight agent that he was hurrying back to Tutt's Cove because his dear brother-in-law was very sick and was hankering for Mr. Widd's presence at his bedside. "And that's only stretching it a little," the new captain informed his friends when they were headed down the harbor. "He may not be sick right at this minute, but he's going to be sick a little later—condemned good and sick!"

ON many occasions Providence protects fools and luck assists novices! Forty-eight hours later the *Eggmoggin* came heaving into Tutt's Cove on the tumbling height of a "spring tide" and only about two jumps ahead of the full force of a white and raging northeaster!

"It's a close squeak," confessed Mr. Widd to the terrified horsemen. "I was so much took up with the business I'm on, that I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to the weather. But I couldn't have planned this thing better if I had tried—having this wind right dead behind us."

"But aint it going to make it dretful hard for us to slow up when we get nigh the wharf?" inquired Mr. Blish.

"And another thing has just come to me," said Mr. Timmons. "You haven't explained to us what the big idea is in regard to evening up with old Tutt, now't we're here!"

Mr. Widd had slipped the wheel into becketts and had picked up a plank on which he had nailed the galley stovepipe in an upright position. He carefully lowered the plank over the rail and paid out on the attached line. "Hun submarine chasing us in," he suggested grimly. "Last one left in the ocean! Look at the peruscoop! That'll make a good item for their dod-blamed newspapers!"

"I aint a seafaring man, and after this scare I don't ever want to be," declared Mr. Briggs. "But if I'm any jedge of something I don't know anything about, I should say that the shore is getting close to us pretty sudden! How do you go about stopping a ship, anyway?"

"Don't get no wrinkles in your under-shirt worrying about that," shouted Mr.

Widd above the bellow of the blast and the screaming of the shrouds. "I'm running this from now on!" There was sudden wildness in his air and tone, and they stared at him. "Get down them stairs, the three of ye, and hang onto anything that looks stout!"

"What the—" yelled Mr. Blish.

"Get down the stairs! There's going to be hell to pave here in about two minutes, and I'm getting the pitch hot!" He was straddled at the wheel; his hat had been blown off, and his hair was roached by the wind. "Get under cover!" he yelled with a fury that made them obey him.

SELECTMAN TUTT'S wharves and emporium made quite an extensive affair. On each side of a dock were two big storehouses, connected by a bridge. Mr. Tutt's store-and-office building was at the head of the dock.

"They're collecting!" growled Mr. Widd, noting men racing toward the water-front from all parts of the village. "And if a man knows his own wife at any considerable distance, that's mine dancing up and down and waving her arms. I hope everybody is seeing that peruscoop! It makes this hurry seem more natural!"

Mr. Widd did not pride himself on his ability as a steersman, but his desperation helped his aim in that juncture: squarely into the dock between the buildings, through the collapsing bridge, came frothing and roaring the old schooner, and then Mr. Widd dived for the companionway. And while he sprawled on the cabin floor in company with his terror-stricken horse-jockey friends, the old *Eggemoggin* came to her everlasting stop, her snapping masts crashing forward into a heap of fragments, her sails flopping over her sides, her jib-boom poked through the side of her owner's store.

When the echo of the last crackling crash had ceased, Mr. Widd's friends sat up on the floor and felt themselves over. They recovered gradually from their fright-paralysis, but could not seem to get command of their tongues or summon any language in which to express their emotions. They shook their fists at Mr. Widd, scrambled up and out of the cabin, leaped on the wharf and fled with all speed from Tutt's Cove.

Mr. Widd followed more leisurely. He faced Mr. Tutt calmly; Mr. Tutt's agonized face was framed in one of the shattered windows.

"Here's your schooner, Mr. Tully Tutt, ee-squire, and I haven't come sneaking home with her! I was on board where you've been saying I belonged, and about which you made me certain promises before the public. I aint condoning anything I've just done, any more than you can condone what you done to me. But if we haven't split even, then my jedgment has got warped over that galley stove, along with my back and my general lovable disposition. If you want to start lawsuits, go ahead! I reckon I can show the court that a man's peace of mind and his reppytation is worth more than an old schooner that was all ready to drop to pieces in a gale and drown five innocent people. Now I bid you a polite good day. Any time you come calling at my farm, I hope you'll find me spry and well, and the same to you!"

Then Mr. Widd turned on his furious wife and checked her with upraised palm. "Actilla Tutt Widd, I reckoned on your being here on the receiving committee, and I hope you had a nice trip down by train. They are launching so many new vessels 'long-coast, that freight-rates have been all shot to pieces. I've been helping you get the cream of the thing as long as it lasted. I don't sound very crazy, do I, when I talk this way? You bet I don't, and I'd like to hear somebody call me crazy. I have given up trotting horses, and you have given up going to sea! Yes, you have! You aint captain of anything any longer except of a cook-stove. It's all right for women to spread themselves all over the lot when there's a war on, but there aint going to be no war any longer unless you want to start one with me. And to prove to you what I am when I've really got woke up, I'll kindly call your attention to the present looks of that schooner! That's a show I got up for your special benefit! Furthermore, when I was threatened by that peruscoop, I came rushing straight to you! Now, Mrs. Widd, my dear, will you be so kind as to take my arm?"

Mrs. Widd frowned upon the staring bystanders and took Mr. Widd's arm.

"NEMESIS PRIED LOOSE," one of the most humorous stories Holman Day has written, will be published in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The Actor-Man



Albert
Payson
Terhune

A MOST amusing story of one of mankind's quaintest activities—amateur theatricals. Mr. Terhune well knows how to present the humorous side of life.

IT began with the "Refined and Side-splitting Minstrel Show," given by the local powder-mill employees at the Odd Fellows Hall, in Paignton. The show netted two hundred and nine dollars for the Thrift-stamp Drive.

Naturally, the Junior Auxiliary of Paignton's Red Cross branch had no part in the minstrel affair, for it was gotten up and performed by persons who were as socially impossible as they were earnest in their efforts for the Cause. Yet the tidings that the minstrels had cleaned up so solid a sum, toward the Drive, rankled in the Auxiliary's collective breast. Hitherto, whenever the Paignton proletariat had raised any substantial amount for a war-fund, the Auxiliary patricians had set to work, with quiet superiority, to show how much more money could be raised in a more exclusive way.

The Auxiliary's members—fifteen strong, of both sexes, and ranging in years from nineteen to twenty-two—met on the Mowbray veranda, and resolved themselves at once into a committee on ways and means.

Viva Mowbray was president of the Auxiliary—for the same reason she was president of her class at college!—for when Viva was available, it never occurred to

anyone that there could be another candidate for high office.

Leonard Carter held down, in perpetuity, the dual job of secretary and treasurer. Leonard was twenty-two, and in his last year at Cornell. He had been debarred from starting upon a meteoric career toward the rank of major-general because he was nearsighted and had one flat foot. So, by way of doing his bit and, incidentally, of keeping in reverent touch with Viva Mowbray,—he hurled himself heart and soul into Paignton's various war-fund drives.

It was Viva who suggested the open-air performance. The idea was all hers.

"Why not let's give a play—an open-air performance? Our lawn would be a gorgeous site for it. The stage could be in the half-circle of trees."

That was all. And the Great Suggestion had been couched in language as simple as Napoleon's at Wagram! It was adopted by acclamation.

The site being chosen, the Auxiliary next turned its thoughts to the minor matter of the play itself.

"Let's go slow!" urged Con Hegan. "Remember, we're only amateurs. Don't let's bite off more than we can swallow. Best steer clear of any big play that will take too long to learn. Suppose we pick

out some easy little snappy one-act comedy—something simple, like 'Box and Cox' or 'Much Ado About Nothing,' or something like that. How about it?"

It was Viva, as usual, who decided.

"I have it!" she declared after an instant of deep self-communion. "I have it! It just came to me. I wonder I didn't think of it right away!"

Instantly fourteen sets of eyes were focused on her in eager expectancy.

"All our class went over to the Stadium to see it!" she continued rapturously. "And it was altogether the most exquisite thing mortal eyes have beheld. And—and I'm perfectly sure we could do it."

"Oh," hazarded Leonard in no vast enthusiasm, "you mean the time you saw Holt Mallowe and Marise Bayne play their condensed version of 'As You Like It' for the Soldiers' Sweater Fund? But—"

"Yes!" Viva breathed dreamily. "That was it. I have had many experiences in my life, of course. But seeing those two geniuses play 'As You Like It' was the very most supreme experience of all, I think. It haunted me for weeks. Holt Mallowe comes nearer being my ideal of a perfect man than anyone else I can ever hope to see. And Marise Bayne's *Rosalind*—well, I'd rather look and act and *be* like Marise Bayne than like—like Helen of Troy! She—"

"But 'As You Like It' is a terribly *long* play," objected Edith King. "It would take forever to learn. And—"

"Not the Mallowe-Bayne version," explained Viva. "I read in the paper, the next day, that it lasted just forty minutes. And it was all in one scene. It would be ever so easy for us to learn. And the trees, down there, at the end of the lawn, would make a wonderful Forest of Arden. And—and I'll be *Rosalind*, if you like. I read the part, over and over and over, after I saw Marise Bayne in it. Some of the girls at college said I—I looked a little like her, too. And I remember just how she played it. That ought to help."

SO it was settled. Viva was to play *Rosalind*. Leonard, by virtue of a two-year experience in directing class plays at college, was appointed stage-director, with the rôle of *The Duke*, as a side-line. To big Con Hegan was assigned the part of *Orlando*—to Leonard's grief and to the secret disgust of five other aspiring youths.

Leonard had read, somewhere, of the

Players Club. Thither he addressed to Holt Mallowe a very businesslike note, to the effect that the Junior Auxiliary of the Paignton Branch of the American Red Cross proposed to give a condensed version of Shakespeare's comedy, "As You Like It." The play, Leonard added, was to be given out of doors, and all the proceeds were to go to the Red Cross—an organization with whose high humanitarian aims he presumed Mr. Mallowe was cognizant. Leonard concluded his note with a courteous request that Mr. Mallowe would lend the Auxiliary a copy of his condensation of the play.

Viva, to whom Leonard showed the note, before mailing it, daringly added the following postscript:

Please don't think I am being bold and impertinent when I say I think you and Miss Bayne were perfectly magnificent in "As You Like It." I shall never forget it.

Gratefully yours,

VIVA MOWBRAY,
President.

Three days later came a reply—to Viva, not to the Secretary and Treasurer.

Mr. Mallowe thanked the Auxiliary's president for liking his work and Miss Bayne's, and said he was going to take the liberty of showing her postscript to Miss Bayne—who, he was certain, would be as much pleased by her praise as was he. Mallowe went on to say he would feel honored to give the Auxiliary permission to use his condensation of the play, and that he would not only forward a copy, but a full set of "sides," as well.

"Look!" said Viva, pointing to the address at the top of the actor's letter. "'Hideaway Cottage, Oakland, New Jersey.' Why, Oakland is less than seven miles from here. He must have a summer place there. I wonder if we dare ask him to come over to the performance? Wouldn't it be gorgeous to be able to say I had played *Rosalind* in the presence of Holt Mallowe?"

"If he ever sees you in it," declared Leonard, "he'll see that you make Marise Bayne look like thirty cents! I never saw her, but I'll bet you'll not only put it all over her in looks, but outact her too."

"No," denied Viva with the sweetly modest gravity which Leonard so worshiped in her, "I won't be able to act it *better* than she does, I'm afraid. I can hardly hope to do that. If I act the part anywhere near as well, I'll be content.

She is wonderful. Of course, she is ever so much older than I am. She must be twenty-four or even twenty-five, I suppose—though her *Red Book* picture, last month, didn't show much age. But what she lacks in youth she makes up in technique."

"Technique!" snorted Leonard from the depths of his experience in no less than two college shows. "That's just a fetish! All you have to remember, in a stage-dialogue, is that both people change places with each other on the stage every time either of them says anything important. That's what is known as 'crossing.' It's marked in the prompt-books by an X. The one on the left side of the stage goes to the right, and the one on the right walks over to the left. Then, of course, the principal character must stand far enough up-stage to keep his face to the audience. And the audience must never see the soles of a player's shoes. Get those three points in mind, and all the rest is easy."

WITH such a stage-director, the rehearsals could not but go well. Upon the wide veranda of Viva's home the Auxiliarians toiled every day. Nightly, at home, they conned the typed "sides."

Leonard went to New York and engaged the costumes. They were to be worn only for the dress-rehearsal and for the performance—two days in all. So the rental of ten outfits, at three dollars a night, would eat into the gross profits to the extent of a bare sixty dollars.

The date for the performance was set. Flaring posters of announcement were smeared over every atom of available wall and tree space for miles around. The local proletariat was coy in its attitude toward the great event. The villagers had heard of Shakespeare, but showed no keen zest to witness one of his justly popular plays—at one dollar a seat. The ticket-sale lagged. Among the better-class population, too, there was wholly controllable enthusiasm over the intellectual treat. Old Mr. Ryerson seemed to embody the gist of neighborhood feeling when he remarked boorishly:

"I can stand Shakespeare. And I can stand amateurs. But to stand both of them at once is just an inch or two past my feeble endurance."

Nevertheless the Auxiliary went on right gallantly with its plans. And presently all was ready. The date for the performance was only six days off.

THEN, on the way to one of the final week's rehearsals, Con Hegan fell off his motorcycle and broke his left leg in two places. No one else could possibly learn the rôle of *Orlando* in six days. There would be no question of postponing the performance, for on the day following it, Viva was going to the Adirondacks for a month.

Leonard, fighting with his back to the wall, changed the wall into a battering ram. How the thought came to him he never could thereafter remember, but it came, and with the vividness of summer lightning flare.

"Viva!" he spluttered, almost beyond speech in his moment of inspiration. "*Viva!* I've got it! It's a ten-to-one shot, but the odds against Napoleon at Austerlitz were more. I dare you to drive over to Oakland with me, this afternoon, and see Holt Mallowe! I dare you to!"

"See Holt Mallowe!" repeated Viva dazedly. "What for? We—"

"And throw ourselves on his mercy, and beg him to save us by coming over here, next Saturday night, and playing *Orlando* for us!" shouted Leonard. "It's our only hope. He knows the part. He's played it, hundreds of times, with Marise Bayne. He's a generous chap, and he's interested in charity. Otherwise he wouldn't have helped us out as he has. Besides, actors are out of a job in summer. And Dad says they're an improvident lot. He met one, once. It's likely Holt Mallowe will jump at the chance of earning a little easy money on the side. We'll offer him—we'll offer him twenty dollars! It's a lot to pay out. But it's better than losing the whole show. I wouldn't have the nerve to offer less. How about it?"

Viva's wonderful eyes were aglow as they beamed upon the enslaved Leonard. He read their depths of meaning. He knew she was picturing herself, in advance, as playing *Rosalind* to the far-worshiped matinée idol's *Orlando*. And beneath his thrill he was aware of a nasty tug at his heart. Almost he regretted his inspiration, but by a mighty effort he thrust self aside.

At four that afternoon the little Carter runabout chugged to a halt at the gate of a picturesquely tumble-down old house on the outskirts of Oakland. Very pale, very straight-backed, very tight of lip, Viva Mowbray and Leonard Carter descended from the car and stalked heroically up the interminably long front walk.

AS they mounted the veranda steps, a man got up from a hammock in which he had been sprawling and came forward inquiringly to meet them. He was stocky of build, browned of face and unromantically old. Viva, after a look at his grizzling temples and the lines around his tired eyes, decided he must be at least forty. He was clad most untidily in corduroy trousers, ugly boots and a brown flannel shirt. His clothes were not only worn and shabby but showed traces of garden mold. And anyone could see he had not shaved for a day or more.

The ill-dressed man's tired face broke into a smile of welcome at sight of the two gloriously youthful callers. And by his famed and oft-pictured smile Viva knew him.

"Mr. Mallowe!" she babbled, aghast.

All Viva's dearest air-castles were tumbling about her pretty ears. In her imagination had long been enshrined the vision of Holt Mallowe, radiant with eternal youth, gracefully dashing, resplendent with Elizabethan raiment. And here before her stood the real man—incredibly old, dressed like a day-laborer, disgustingly matter-of-fact. By his wondrous smile alone could she have guessed his identity.

Leonard, expecting less than had she, was quicker to recover a remnant of his senses.

"Mr. Mallowe," he said in the terse captain-of-industry voice he had been at such pains to acquire, "Miss Mowbray and I have had some correspondence with you in regard to our open-air performance of your condensed version of 'As You Like It.' As we told you in our letters, we are ever so grateful for all you have done for us."

"Why, not at all!" broke in Mallowe pleasantly, "I was mighty glad to be of any use to you. Come into the shade and sit down, wont you? It's hot, out here on the steps. You're just in time for afternoon tea. —Betty!"

As he talked, he led the way to a bevy of low wicker chairs deep in the veranda. His call of "Betty!" was addressed to some one whose footsteps could be heard crossing the hall inside.

In answer to the summons a woman moved out through the Dutch doorway onto the porch—a comely woman, somewhere in the thirties, freckled and tanned. She wore a shirt-waist and a corduroy skirt, and had apparently just come in from gardening.

"Dear," Mallowe hailed her, "I want you to meet two fellow-actors of mine—Miss Mowbray and Mr. Carter. This is my wife," he added in careless explanation to the visitors. "And I can tell by the expression of her chin that she is about to order tea served out here for us all, and that she is going to give us some of her own immortal fruit cake with it. Sit down, wont you?"

Viva's brain positively refused to work. The shock of finding the sublime Holt Mallowe an ill-dressed and elderly man was superseded by the greater shock of learning he was married, and that his wife was a very ordinary and common, sensible mortal of middle age. Were there *no* unsmashable illusions, in all this degradingly sordid world?

Mrs. Mallowe greeted the guests in a jolly, almost motherly fashion, and bustled off to order tea. Whereat Leonard made another effort to get to the point of his call.

"You see," he said somewhat breathlessly, "we're in an awful hole. The performance is—was—is to be next Saturday night. The tickets are out. —We were going to send you two. And now our *Orlando* has just broken his leg, and there's no one to take his place. And we're in an awful hole. And—and we're in an *awful* hole!"

At this stage of the harangue his courage treacherously departed, leaving him gaping and purple and speechless. Which, had he known it, was the very best thing that could have happened to him at that particular moment, for the amused light in Mallowe's tired eyes gave place to a sudden warm sympathy for the pitifully floundering youngster.

(Chronic panhandlers in his own profession had learned to rejoice at that look on Mallowe's face, and had striven artfully to evoke it, for it meant largess.)

Viva forced herself back to reality.

"It means so much for the Red Cross," she pleaded, "and it means so much more for—for *us*! And there isn't any time for any other man to learn the part. And oh, Mr. Mallowe, I know what a horribly cheeky thing it is to ask—we both know. But *would* you consent to come over to Paignton that night—it's only seven miles, you know—and—and play *Orlando* for us? You see, it's the only way to save the performance. I'm the *Rosalind*. And I've counted so on—on—"

Here, like Leonard, she found herself deprived of speech. And also like Leonard, she started in scarlet-faced misery at the arbiter of their joint destinies.

As she started, Viva all at once forgot her discovery that her stage deity was an old and slovenly mortal. For the smile had come back to Holt Mallowe's sensitive lips, a smile, this time, that did perfectly beautiful things to his whole face.

"Why, you poor little babes in the wood!" cried the actor with a mighty and utterly non-stagy laugh. "Of course I will! I'll do it gladly. I'll be delighted to. I—"

A wordless gurgle of pure rapture, from Viva, broke in on his acceptance, a million times more eloquently than an engrossed address of gratitude.

"You're a brick!" declaimed Leonard, his voice shaky with joyous reaction. "And Mr. Mallowe," he added, wrenching himself back into his best-loved personification of a Napoleon of finance, "much as—as we appreciate your being so—so magnanimous about it, we plan to put this on a business basis, you know. We are prepared to pay you twenty dollars for the service—the *great* service—you are rendering us.

"The money wont make our debt to you any the less, of course, sir. We realize that. But we shall not feel we are putting you out so unwarrantably, you see. I don't quite know what your regular rates are, but—"

"My 'regular rates' vary a good deal," interposed Mallowe with ponderous solemnity. "So it is hard to strike an average. I am afraid twenty dollars is an exorbitant sum for a single evening's work. It might give managers an exaggerated idea of my value. Suppose we compromise, for the good of the Cause? I will donate my services, and you can turn over the twenty dollars to the Red Cross treasury. Here comes the tea."

BEFORE the visitors went away, all arrangements for the performance had been made. Mallowe had even offered to come over to the remaining rehearsals in order to get accustomed to playing with a strange company.

He seemed to recognize, by instinct, Leonard's efficiency as a stage-director, for he did not suggest coaching the amateurs. Indeed, he listened with approving respect to certain details of stage-direction which

Leonard kindly expounded to him. And he was to furnish his own costume—sending to his New York apartment for it, and thus saving the treasury six dollars.

The next morning, at eleven, a super-excited Auxiliary was grouped on the Mowbray veranda, feverishly awaiting the arrival of the great man. Leonard was latest of the members to reach the scene of the rehearsal. He had been up since dawn, driving from one end of the township to the other, affixing to every "As You Like It" poster a flaring strip which announced:

MR. HOLT MALLOWE as *Orlando*.

Leonard fancied Mallowe's name might induce a few more people to buy tickets. He had also ordered a new issue of programs headed by the large-type announcement:

Miss Viva Mowbray and Mr. Holt Mallowe,
in
"AS YOU LIKE IT"

"If we were giving this in New York," explained Leonard as he finished telling of his morning's work, "there would be quite a number of people attracted to the show if they heard Mallowe was to be in it. But up here I don't suppose a dozen natives ever heard of him. I had those strips gotten up, mostly, to let everyone know we had found a substitute for Con, and that the show wasn't off."

"I do hope people wont misunderstand him," sighed Viva worriedly, "when they see him coming to and from rehearsals here. He dresses so terribly, and he is so much older than most actors. But he is fine. I know you'll like him, ever so much."

A CAR came up the drive. At the wheel was Holt Mallowe. He looked no younger or more dramatic than on the day before. But Viva was infinitely relieved to note he had been freshly shaved, and that he wore a strikingly well-appointed lounge-suit of stone gray.

Mallowe did not seem at all ill at ease, on meeting so many strangers. And the rehearsal began.

Then, bit by bit, things happened. No one could tell just how or when the change began. Mallowe did not dispute or defy any of Leonard's directions. Yet—always showing entire deference to the director—he fell to suggesting minor alterations in one thing after another. He did it in such

a way that Leonard, half the time, wondered whether the suggestions were not perhaps his own, instead of the new-comer's.

Rôle after rôle emerged from chaos into a semblance of logical coherence. The time was woefully short. Holt Mallowe was achieving miracles, which would have called forth the wondering praise of fellow-professionals, but which his present associates regarded as the most natural things in the world.

Oddly enough, it was from his erstwhile acolyte Viva Mowbray that Mallowe met with his only resistance in the task of smoothing a mass of singsong and explosive declamation into tolerable diction. Their first clash came when *Orlando*, having won the wrestling match, turns to *Rosalind* for his meed of praise. Viva, flinging the chain about his neck, flung with it the ringingly scanned assertion:

"'Sir, you have wrestled well and overthrown'" (full pause for end of metric line) "'More than your enemies.'"

"Oh, Viva," cut in Leonard, "Mr. Mallowe thinks—and I think I agree with him—that you ought not to make that speech sound quite so much like 'The Charge of the Six Hundred,' and more colloquial."

"Something like this," supplemented Mallowe timidly.

He repeated the line in a way that sent funny wiggles through the hearts of several listening girls. He somehow raised the vision of an adoring maiden who tries to say the right thing, yet who is frightened lest she overstep shy modesty.

But Viva was unmoved. She had read her part and reread it, in front of her mirror, every night for weeks, and no outsider was going to upset her clearly thought-out concept of it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mallowe," she said with perfect breeding, "but I'm afraid I must read the line as my good taste and experience tell me it should be read. I remember how Marise Bayne rendered that same line, when I saw you two in 'As You Like It.' She was charming, of course. And she is a great actress, probably the greatest in America. But I thought, at the time, that—if there *could* be any criticism of her acting—it was that she spoke that line, and a number of others, just as if she were—were *talking*—as if she were a modern girl, here in America, instead of a Shakespearean heroine. You don't mind my saying so, do you? I—"

"Not at all," replied Mallowe. "You're probably right. We're a hidebound lot, we actors."

FOR a moment Viva's soft brows creased in a half-fear that he was guying her. But Mrs. Mallowe, who had come to this rehearsal with her husband, spoke up before the fear could crystallize.

"Of course Miss Mowbray is right," she averred. "Her reading of the line is very original indeed."

Viva had grown to feel a little sorry for the actor-genius who was fettered to such a prosaic little home-body. She had even wondered how he could endure Mrs. Mallowe's stodgy companionship after his constant association with a divinity like Marise Bayne. Now she decided he was not so much to be pitied as she had feared. Elderly Mrs. Mallowe certainly had brains, brains and discernment. Yet Viva would not have Mallowe think himself snubbed. So she went on sweetly:

"I see your side of the question too, Mr. Mallowe, of course. And from the way you just repeated the line, I can see you must have coached Marise Bayne in it. And I don't doubt that when you first learned the line, years ago, that would have been a simply beautiful way to render it, the *only* way, perhaps. But for *now*—don't you see it isn't quite—well, quite up to date? For us, I mean. When you repeat it in that ordinary way, it sounds just like *talking*, not at all like *acting*, as I understand the term. It sounds almost—almost *flippant*, doesn't it? And whatever else he is, Shakespeare can hardly be called flippant."

MEANTIME Paignton was waking up. So was "the Valley," to the north. So was the powder-town just to westward. In fact, to Ridgewood and to Paterson and to Montclair itself the news was gushing—the news that the sublime Holt Mallowe was to play the "lead" in an amateur show at Paignton on Saturday night. And—in droves—people began to buy tickets.

On Friday night the dress rehearsal was held. The actors were to appear not only in costume but in make-up. When Holt Mallowe and his wife arrived on the electric-lighted lawn, they were confronted with a cohort of youths and maidens whose faces ranged in hue from prairie fires to lake sunsets, the carmine tints flaring forth from spectral white.

For the first time, Mallowe despaired. While he still blinked, tongue-tied, his wife came to the rescue.

"Splendid!" she exclaimed. "Who taught you clever children how to make up?"

"I told them how to do it," said Leonard with pardonable pride. "And I made up some of them myself. I learned how, at our college shows."

"But," asked Mrs. Mallowe as an afterthought, "weren't those plays given *in-doors*?"

"Why, yes," he answered, troubled by her new air of anxiety. "But what difference does that make?"

"All the difference in the world," was her sorrowful reply. "A make-up that is perfect for the theater would look ghastly at an open-air performance."

"That's true!" spoke up Mallowe in great haste. "Perfectly true. The—the outside air seems to have an altogether different color, even by electric light. If you don't mind, Mrs. Mallowe and I can make the few minor changes in your make-up that will tone it to the outside light. Shall we? We've both had a great deal to do with open-air performances, and—"

"Please do," assented Leonard.

The actor and his capable spouse set cheerily to work. After they had deftly undone Leonard's labor, Mallowe vanished into his dressing-room, carrying his shabby suit-case. Thence, in a bewilderingly brief time, emerged a man whom at first glance they scarce recognized.

He was not a mere grease-paint actor. He was *Orlando*, the poet-swain of the Arden woodlands, eternally young, gloriously handsome, lithe, graceful, high-bred, afire with youthful magnetism. In the soft light he showed no trace of his artistically applied make-up. Nor was there the faintest sign of middle age or of the real Mallowe's everyday commonplace-ness.

Leonard Carter saw the worship-glow leap into Viva's big eyes, and he thrilled with something akin to nausea. That look seemed to render ridiculous all hopes of the heavenly reply he had taught himself to dream of Viva's giving him, when—the performance over—he should ask her a tremblingly rehearsed question.

"First scene!" he rasped with *Simon Legree* ferocity. "Miss Mowbray, Miss King, Mr. Ryerson, Mr. Blount! Stage, please!"

Between his own double duties as director and as *The Duke*, Leonard spent a deliriously busy forty minutes. Yet he had time to note—and to note with stark misery—a myriad changes in Viva's acting. For one thing, when she flung the chain over Orlando's shoulders, she said now in adorable diffidence:

"Sir, you have wrestled well!"

Then she halted, and with a little catching breath of ecstasy blurted out the sweet confession:

"And overthrown *more* than your enemies!"

Mrs. Mallowe, in the wings, sat up and blinked, much as might a bored music-teacher whose dullest pupil suddenly begins playing with the skill of Paderewski. Leonard wished morosely that he had a sore tooth to bite on, or a mortal enemy to thrash.

"You know," he told Viva as he lingered on the Mowbray veranda a moment after the rehearsal was over, "you know, Viva, you never acted, before, as you acted to-night. You were a revelation!"

Thus much his honesty forced him to say. Then human nature took control, and he continued:

"But don't let yourself forget that Mr. Mallowe is old enough to be your father, and that he's married too—married to a nice little woman, as nice as she's dowdy. Mr. Mallowe—"

To his horror, Viva broke into a passion of tears and ran blindly into the house.

THE performance was scheduled for eight-thirty on Saturday night. As the simple stage was already set for its one scene, and as the actors were dressed and made up before seven, the play began a very little after nine o'clock—which was not bad for an amateur performance.

Yet the delay would probably have whitened Leonard's hair had he still been capable of emotion. But he was curiously numb in mind and body. Mechanically he walked through his myriad duties, trying not to remember—trying, especially, to keep away from Viva and from that awful new light in her eyes.

At last the orchestra began to play. This musical aggregation was made up of Auxiliary members,—four in all,—who mistreated the ukulele, the banjo, the mandolin and another ukulele. Its quartet of musicians had had time to learn only four selections that they could play together.

When the fourth of these was played, there was a hopeless stillness from the little orchestra-pit, a stillness that did hideous things to the waiting amateurs' nerves. And then, after a century or more of anguished waiting, the curtain went up.

In the condensed version *Rosalind* comes on the stage a minute after the beginning of the action. Viva's entrance was the signal for polite applause from at least twenty-five pairs of hands in the audience.

Almost directly afterward Holt Mallowe came on. And the audience rose at him, with an enthusiasm that halted the play dead short for a full three minutes, completely throwing Viva out of her lines and filling her with a strange tingling pride.

As Viva had the next speech to make, this caused a shuffling silence on the stage until Mrs. Mallowe's kindly voice, from the front row of the orchestra, whispered the lost line to her. And as Viva delivered it she mentally blessed the good-hearted dame who took such a friendly interest in her talented husband's colleagues. Yet she felt a pang of reasonless guilt at accepting such a favor from Mrs. Mallowe.

AT last it was all over, and the audience was standing up and clamoring for another and still another glimpse of Holt Mallowe. Again and again, the actor was forced to take frantically demanded curtain-calls. And not once would he consent to come before the curtain without Viva. Holding her deliriously trembling hand, he drew her forth with him every time—and always bowed low to her after his bow to the audience.

At length some one yelled:

"Speech!"

The cry was taken up by a hundred voices. Still holding Viva's hand, Mallowe took a step forward, drawing her along at his side.

"In the name of the company," he said with his ordinary voice, very pleasant and colloquial, "—in the name of the company, Miss Mowbray and I thank you most heartily for liking our work to-night. We thank you, too, for your contribution to the great cause for which our play was given. The Forest of Arden is an informal place. As we are still in that Forest, I am going to ask you to do something informal.

Miss Mowbray and Mr. Leonard Carter deserve all praise for the pleasure you have been good enough to derive here, to-night. Will you give them three American cheers?"

As he spoke, Mallowe took a quick step sideward and clutched the wrist of Leonard, who gloomed, soul-sick, behind the shelter of the low proscenium arch. Mallowe pulled the young director out before the footlights, in time to bow miserably in apathy to the tumultuous triple cheer.

Before the trio could bow themselves behind the curtain again, some one in the middle of the audience pointed excitedly at a woman in the front row and yelled:

"Three cheers for Marise Bayne!"

EVERY eye was turned in the direction of the man's pointing finger. A babel of frenzied cheering arose from the whole audience, while hundreds of necks were craned to locate the worshiped actress. Viva, Leonard, the play—all were ignored in the audience's wild eagerness to gaze on its idol.

Light as a boy, Holt Mallowe sprang over the shallow orchestra pit, leaving Viva and Leonard to look after themselves. Viva had not even dreamed Marise Bayne was to be there. She tingled afresh with the thought of having played *Rosalind* in the genius' presence.

Mallowe had caught some woman by the hand and was gallantly helping her up the three steps that ran from the stage's O. P. side to the orchestra.

"Good Lord!" exploded Dicky Romaine from the wings. "The nerve of him! They called for Marise Bayne, and instead, he's lugging along that wife of his. He—"

His mutterings were drowned in a salvo of applause. Mrs. Mallowe, flushed and laughing and very lovely, stood bowing and kissing her hand in response to the ecstatic welcome.

To Viva, the sickening truth came in one pitiless flash. With a groping gesture she sought Leonard's arm and clung shakily—lovingly—to him.

"Oh, Len!" she wailed with incoherent fervor as he led her protectingly behind the curtain, a glorious new life pulsing in his numb heart. "I'm glad you act so badly. I'm glad! Because I just hate actors! I hate them! Oh, I hate them!"

A Selling Slump

HARGREAVES was worried about cheese — his ability to sell it, that is. And thereby hangs this well-conceived and stimulating story.



Elmer E. Ferris

AT some time or other every man, no matter what his job, falls into a slump. By this I mean not merely falling below his best, — a man is seldom at his best even when he is above his average, — but falling below his average, when he begins to lose effectiveness in the things he knows he can do; in other words, when he loses his customary punch, he has retrograded into a slump.

Now, one of the characteristics of a slump is the mystery of it to the man who is slumping. Take, for instance, the baseball player whose batting average is around .375. Comes a day when he fails to make a hit. Comes another day just like it — several days, weeks! Don't ask him what is the matter; he cannot enlighten you, and besides, his language would not be proper. So far as he can see, he is playing the game in the same old way. He walks toward the plate swinging three bats just as he always did, discards two of them, rubs his hands in the dirt, kicks his cleats into the ground, pulls down his cap, taps the plate with his bat, and when the ball comes, he steps into it and swings just as he always did. Did he connect with the ball? He did not! Perhaps you can tell why, but he can't. All he knows is that he has fallen into a batting slump.

So with the business or professional man when he begins to lose out where he has been in the habit of winning. So far as he knows, he is going through the daily routine

in the same old way, and yet for some mysterious and inexplicable reason (to him), his proposition fails to get across as it formerly did. He has gotten into a slump.

It is possibly true, as a New York sales-manager once said, that no clan of people is more addicted to slumps than traveling salesmen. "Because," said he, "a good salesman is temperamental; if he were not temperamental, he would not be so good a salesman, and it takes temperament to slump."

Be that as it may, if somebody could discover the cause of slumps and also the remedy, he would be a public benefactor, especially to sales-managers. Probably no such discovery and remedy could be found in the experience of any one man, and yet some light might be thrown upon the question by the case of a certain man who pulled out of a bad slump. It may add somewhat to the reader's interest if we intimate, confidentially, that there is more truth than fiction in the narrative.

JAMES HARGREAVES had very little appetite for supper, and as he passed out of the dining-room into the hotel lobby, he felt irritated when Sam Overman breezed up and gave him a friendly slap upon the back.

"How are they coming, Jimmy?" asked Sam.

"Rotten!" growled Jimmy.

"So? Why, business generally is pretty good, I find. What's the trouble with cheese?"

"You can search me. The cheese-game has gone punk. How are things in your line?"

"Fine! Why, say, I sold Johnson-Sanger six hundred dollars this afternoon. That's going some for hardware specialties."

"Sure! Well, I must go up to my room and write some letters."

He went up to his room, but he did not write any letters. Instead he sat there nearly three hours with his hat pulled down over his eyes, moodily chewing at the end of an unlighted cigar.

For more than three weeks Jimmy had been in a selling slump. Several days ago he had passed the philosophical stage where a man in a slump says to himself: "Never mind, old boy, it's all part of the game. To-morrow is a new day that hasn't been touched." He had now sunk into those slumpy depths where a fellow gets into a grouch toward everything and everybody.

UPON this day of which I write, Jimmy had made twelve calls and sold only two small bills—so small, in fact, that he was ashamed to send them in; and things had been going this way for three weeks. That evening at the close of the day's work as he plodded listlessly up the street toward the hotel, his attitude was like that of a baseball pitcher on the way to the club-house just after being knocked out of the box. "If I didn't know I could sell goods," muttered he, "why, then I would call myself a dub and quit the game. There's something the matter with this confounded line."

As a matter of fact, Jimmy was a regular salesman. His house considered him one, and he had never doubted it himself, but how about the last three weeks?

In his pocket was a letter from his sales-manager received that day: "I see they are using you a little rough, old man," wrote the sales-manager, "but keep right on plugging, and you will turn the corner. Persistence is half of the game."

"It's easy enough for a man to sit in the office and give advice to a fellow out on the firing-line," grumbled Jimmy. "I'd like to know how a guy could plug any harder than I've plugged to-day, and only

two little dinky orders to show for it. Gee, it's fierce!"

That evening as he sat in the room gloomily staring the situation in the face, he was making a last desperate effort to discover the source of the difficulty. Of course, the fault was not in him. He was the same fellow that he had always been, and was working his trade the same way as he always had. The truth seemed to be—and Jimmy had hesitated to admit it even to himself—that the trouble was in his line of goods. This was the first time in his selling career that he had ever seriously quarreled with his line. His company was an extensive manufacturer and importer of fancy cheese. Like all good salesmen, he had been thoroughly sold upon the merits of his line. Every one of his specialties had been like a personal friend and brother to him. One of the joys of his work had been to describe those goods.

"Now, that domestic Swiss of ours," Jimmy would say, "is made in a factory that is an exact duplicate of a Swiss factory, and when you cut that piece of goods, you find it just as white and sappy and large-eyed as the genuine imported article. Why, you have to call in an expert to tell the difference." Then there was the domestic Camembert in tins: "So rich and smooth that it melts in your mouth, and we seal it up in this elegant lithographed tin container—why, it sells itself. And say, when a man tastes it once, you've got him going; he can't get away from that flavor!"

Similarly with all their special products. Jimmy had believed it, too. Why shouldn't he? Some goods are the best goods, and Jimmy's company had undertaken to perform that job and had put it across too! He could give scores of reasons why this was so, and he had sold the goods, too—

But now he had begun to wonder if there really were such a difference between his goods and those competing lines. Wasn't there a lot of hot air in all that talk about superior quality? There were plenty of people who thought that other goods were equally meritorious. After all, when you get right down to it, cheese is cheese. And wasn't cheese a kind of a punk selling-proposition, anyway? The consumption of the line was too limited. Why not get into a line that moves—hardware specialties, for instance. There was Sam Overman, selling goods hand over fist.

"On an even chance, I could sell rings around that guy," thought Jimmy. These and many similar meditations filled his mind until bed-time, and when he put off his clothes and prepared to retire, he had struck the rock-bottom of moodiness and disgust. He had an uneasy feeling of disloyalty, too.

HARGREAVES had scarcely fallen asleep when he was awakened by a noise as if some one were entering the room. He sat up and snapped on the electric light above his head. The door was open, and there in the center of the room stood a large loaf of domestic Swiss cheese. It had a sturdy pair of legs under it. Jimmy rubbed his eyes incredulously, but there it stood, regarding Jimmy with a benignant smile on its expansive surface.

"Good evening, son," saluted the Swiss. "You weren't expecting a call from me, no?"

"Not exactly," admitted Jimmy, "but I was thinking about you just before I went to bed."

"Pleasant thoughts—kind thoughts, what?"

"Well—er—"

"See here, son, on the square, now, you were knocking me—that's what!" And the Swiss advanced to the bedside and wagged his loaf reprovingly. "That is the first time you ever went back on me. Now tell me, did I ever go back on you? Haven't I always delivered the goods?"

Jimmy nodded his head shamefacedly.

"Sure!" asserted the Swiss. "And now let me ask you something. Look me in the face, my boy. What do you see?"

"A Swiss cheese," said Jimmy.

"Yes, but what's your impression? How do I strike you?"

"Oh, you look like a smooth old boy with a good digestion," grinned Jimmy.

"That's it," responded the Swiss approvingly. "Whenever they cut me open, they always find me sweet and smooth and mild inside. That's why I get across. That's why people are fond of me."

"Gee, I like to see a fellow on good terms with himself," muttered Jimmy.

"So does everybody if he's got the goods," asserted the Swiss. "The trouble with you, Jimmy, is that you aren't on good terms with yourself or anybody else. Here you sat all the evening humped up with a frown. Did you ever know a frown to get a man anywhere? Say, why

didn't you sell Mr. Morgan one or two tubs of Swiss to-day?"

"Yes, why didn't I!" exclaimed Jimmy impatiently. "Didn't I crowd him so hard that he got hot about it?"

"Exactly! You didn't get him interested—you simply got him hot. 'Cause why? Because you had a frown on, and anybody could see it. Why, if I had such a ferment inside of me as you have, it would put me off the market. Better spend part of your mornings getting on good terms with yourself and with your job, my boy. Keep sweet inside like a Swiss cheese, and then you—"

"JUST a moment, gentlemen," interrupted a voice over near the door, and to Jimmy's amazement there came tripping across the room one of his favorite sellers—his domestic Camembert in a lithographed tin container. Upon the top of his can was perched a stylish Derby hat. His hands were incased in a pair of kid gloves, and he sported a silver-tipped cane. "Just a moment, please," cried the Camembert as he stepped in front of the Swiss, who retreated to the wall and surveyed his dudish brother with a look of mingled amusement and admiration. "I want a word or two with you myself, Jimmy," continued the Camembert. "Give me the once-over, old man, and tell me: can you suggest any improvement in this get-up?" And he strutted about complacently.

"You are certainly the cheese," admitted Jimmy.

"That's what!" cried the Camembert. "I'm an ornament to any delicatessen-counter. Isn't that right?"

"Sure, and that is what I tell everybody, too. What are you trying to put over on me?"

"Just this!" retorted the Camembert sharply. "Look at those shoes of yours—how long since you had a shine?"

"About four days, I guess."

"Exactly—dirty shoes! And look at those pantaloons, wrinkled and bagged at the knees. They look like secondhand—"

"Oh, well, a man can't keep running—"

"Yes, he can!" interrupted the Camembert. "He can find plenty of time to go to a tailor-shop. You are getting slouchy, Jimmy. Now, listen! The first thing that talks when you go into a store is your clothes. A man's clothes indicate his self-respect, and people respect a man who respects himself—see?"

"Oh, well, I know plenty of fellows who put things across that don't—"

"Furthermore," continued the Camembert, ignoring the interruption, "clothes indicate a man's prosperity. People will patronize a man who is prospering, but they knock a man who isn't. That's human nature."

"All the same," cried Jimmy, "there's a whole lot of four-flushing in clothes."

"What of it? I've been informed that men often take in a pot on a four-flush. But it isn't a matter of four-flushing, Jimmy. When a man looks decent and prosperous, his statements carry more weight. That's where you fell down at Gorman & Company this morning."

"Oh, come off!" protested Jimmy. "Didn't Mr. Gorman say that the Camembert was moving slow, and that he had two cases on hand? Do you call it good salesmanship to overstock a man?"

"No, but you didn't need to overstock him. It was up to you to help him move the goods. That is where salesmanship comes in. A regular salesman will get up schemes to help the merchant move the stock, and—"

"Hold on, now! Didn't I start to tell Gorman how to get those goods going, and didn't he cut me off?"

"Exactly! But how did you do it? You talked like a man who didn't half believe what he was saying, and you looked like a man in hard luck. Merchants won't take pointers from a salesman who puts up that kind of a front. For heaven's sake, old man, brush up and brace up! Try and look like prosperity and act like it. You aren't giving me any kind of backing. Why, just suppose the Company should pack me up in a dirty, rusty can—wouldn't that tie a can on me? Ha, ha, ha!" And the Camembert gave Jimmy a jocular poke in the ribs with his cane.

"THAT'S the stuff, Cammy, poke him in the slats—poke him in the slats!" called a jovial voice from the doorway; and bounding into the room with a hop, skip and jump came a one-pound package of Limburger. He was wrapped in foil and had a bright yellow label outside. He wore striped pantaloons and bright tan shoes and had a rakish hat cocked upon the corner of his package. He pirouetted in a circle and fox-trotted back and forth for an instant, and then halting beside the bed and crossing one leg over the other,

he doffed his hat at Jimmy with a Charley Chaplin flourish.

"Some cheese, old scout, some cheese!" he cried gayly.

"Some cheese!" admitted Jimmy with a grin. The Limburger stepped closer to the bed and unwrapped a corner of his package. "Get that aroma?" he asked.

"Get it!" exclaimed Jimmy. "A man couldn't get anything else!"

"That's what they all say," replied the Limburger complacently. "I'm the boy with a punch! If there's another cheese on earth that can back me off the boards, just nominate it."

"No, you've got 'em all going," admitted Jimmy.

"Now you're talking!" cried the Limburger. "And I've got a bone to pick with you, Jimmy. Why didn't you sell Mr. Schmidt some Limburger to-day?"

"Schmidt! Why, the old guy wouldn't talk business! He said he didn't need anything—had plenty until I came again."

"He did, did he? Well, some other salesman will come along next week and sell him twenty cases. It was up to you to get that order. You quit; that's what you did! You showed a yellow streak just because Schmidt sat on you a little. You lost your punch."

"What would you do," cried Jimmy, angrily, "—call him a liar or paste him on the nose? When old Schmidt wont buy, you might as well try to bluff a grizzly."

"See here, Jimmy, there comes a turn in every business transaction, a psychological moment when—"

"Pardon me, brother, did you say psychological moment?" interrupted the Camembert facetiously.

"That's what I said," retorted the Limburger, turning menacingly toward the Camembert. "And I said punch too. Got any objection?"

"Oh, not a-tall, not a-tall!" replied the Camembert suavely.

"Now, don't pull any of that stuff on me!" exclaimed the Limburger hotly.

"Come, come, boys," protested the Swiss, stepping in between the belligerents, "let's not have a family row."

The Limburger recovered himself.

"Oh, well, Cammy's all right. He is a credit to the line, but he gets a little too fresh. I feel like mussing him up sometimes."

"What about that psychological moment?" asked Jimmy.

"Why, there comes a time in every interview when one man is going to overtop the other. Look at *me*, now—don't I always dominate the interview?"

"That's what!" admitted Jimmy. "But what is a fellow to do when an old duffer like Schmidt simply won't listen."

"Interest him—interest him! Talk up your line, get next to him—that's what a salesman will do if he has the punch. That's where a quitter flunks out every time. Just imagine me without my punch. Supposing I quit when people knock me? Is there any other cheese that gets as much knocking as I do? But I keep right on packing my punch, and people keep right on eating Limburger. You have a punch, Jimmy, but you haven't been packing it lately."

"Go to it, fellows: rub it in—rub it in!" protested Jimmy Hargreaves with a deprecating grin.

The Limburger hesitated an instant; then suddenly turning toward the open door, he shouted: "Come on in, boys, and give Jimmy the raz." And into the room there marched a procession of cheeses: Brie, Cream, Neufchatel, Pimento, Welsh Rarebit, English Dairy, Edam, Gouda, Munster and all the rest of Jimmy's specialties. They joined hands, and forming into a line, danced back and forth singing lustily in chorus:

"For Jimmy's a jolly good fellow,
A jolly, good f-e-e-llow,
A salesman and regular fellow,
Which nobody can deny!"

Then turning about and forming into a line, they filed out through the doorway, headed by the one-pound Limburger doing a Charley Chaplin hop, meanwhile keeping up a chant of

"Jimmy's a jolly good fellow."

When the chorus died away in the distance, Jimmy arose from the bed and stepping softly to the doorway, he peered outside, but the hallway was empty.

WHEN Jimmy awoke in the morning, he sat up in bed and meditated upon the strange events of the night. The details passed vividly before his mind. He scratched his head reflectively. "Some dream!" he exclaimed.

Suddenly he sprang out of bed and began to dress.

"Any place near here where a fellow

can get his clothes pressed while he waits?" he asked the clerk after breakfast.

"Right across the street," replied the clerk.

AN hour later, his clothes neatly pressed, his shoes shined and his sample-case in hand, Jimmy stepped briskly out upon the street and headed straight for the store of August Schmidt.

"Top of the morning, Mr. Schmidt!" he cried. "I thought I'd drop in a minute before train-time and tell you more about that one-pound Limburger of ours."

"I said yesterday I wasn't in the market," retorted Schmidt gruffly.

"Sure," laughed Jimmy, "but this is a new day, and you sell lots of Limburger."

"Nothing doing this trip," asserted Schmidt as he turned to give some directions to one of his clerks.

"All right, but don't forget that our one-pound Limburger has got 'em all going. I don't understand why you never stocked it. Say, have you noticed how the market is?"

"How is the market?" asked Schmidt.

"Going up."

"What is your price to-day?"

"Twenty-three for the twos, and twenty-four and a half for the ones."

"That is the same as it has been."

"Sure, and that's why it is such a good buy. It's a cinch that Limburger will go higher. You could do a corking good business with that brand of ours. We put that brand on nothing but the classy goods."

"I have got plenty just now," said Schmidt.

"If I could get up a bet," smiled Jimmy, "I would go you the cigars that you haven't got five cases in stock."

"Then you would lose the bet. —Say, Joe,"—to the clerk,— "go to the basement and see how much Limburger we got."

Joe returned presently and reported four cases on hand.

"Cigars on you!" cried Jimmy. "Will that stock last more than two weeks, Mr. Schmidt?"

Schmidt rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "If you will give me that price and ship ten cases three weeks from now, you can send it."

"No, the house wouldn't stand for it. The market is too stiff. But say, I'll do this: I will take a chance and send you ten cases of twos and five cases of ones in ten days, and give you the old price." And Jimmy pulled out his order-book.

"Send it along," grunted Schmidt.

"Much obliged, Mr. Schmidt," said Jimmy as he wrote down the order and handed over the copy. "And you'll be much obliged to me!"

"I hope so," rejoined Mr. Schmidt.

AS Jimmy left the store, he glanced at his watch. "Plenty of time to run over and give Gorman a little holler," thought he.

Fortunately, Mr. Gorman had just finished reading his mail.

"I only want a minute or two," said Jimmy briskly. "That tin Camembert of ours is going great guns, and of course you know what a fancy piece of goods it is, and—"

"Certainly, but I told you that it isn't moving very fast with us, and we have enough for the present," replied Mr. Gorman.

"Sure, and that is why I am back here. You ought to move it faster, and I know how I can help you do it. I will send a good supply—enough to fill up a show-window—and then allow one can free for sampling purposes with each case. You know when you get a customer to taste that cheese, you make a sale."

"That might be a good plan, but we have too many things to push. I guess we'll pass it up this trip."

"Tell you what I'll do, Mr. Gorman," said Jimmy, urgently. "I'll ship you twelve cases and will run back here next Saturday morning and dress up your show-window with it, and stay here all day and sell it to your trade. I will move a bunch of it, too. We can start something! Those goods repeat. What do you say?"

Mr. Gorman smiled at Jimmy's enthusiasm.

"Very well, Jimmy, if you want to give me a day's work, I'll try it on."

"Believe me, we'll hand it out to beat the band," cried Jimmy as he shook hands.

"FORTY minutes left," said Hargreaves to himself as he hurried down the street. "Guess I'll run over and chin Morgan about that Swiss."

"What, still in town, Jimmy?" said Mr. Morgan as Jimmy breezed into the store.

"Still in town!" grinned Jimmy. "I never run away from business, Mr. Morgan. I wanted to show you a market-report I got this morning. Just see what Swiss is doing. I guess there's nothing to it but another advance."

Mr. Morgan scanned the market report.

"Oh, well, I'll pay the market price when I need some more," said he, handing it back to Jimmy.

"I believe you said you had half a tub on hand?"

"Yes, two loaves."

"That will last you about three weeks?"

"Just about."

Jimmy thrust his hands into his pockets meditatively. "There's a big demand just now for those goods," said he. "We are oversold. I couldn't ship right now, anyway. Tell you what I'll do: I'll ship a couple of tubs on the fifteenth,—that's a week from now,—and I'll make it the same price as last. It's good property, Mr. Morgan. You can't possibly fall down on it."

"Same grade as the last you sent me?"

"Absolutely."

Mr. Morgan looked at the calendar. "Ship it on the seventeenth," said he.

"LET'S see," mused Jimmy complacently as he hurried back to the hotel. "Five, seven, nine—nine hundred dollars' worth of cheese, and only ten o'clock. If that isn't going some, then I'm a Chinaman."

The bus backed up in front, and the porter called the train just as Jimmy paid his bill. On the way out, he encountered Sam Overman.

"Off?" asked Sam.

"Sure—when do you get away?"

"This afternoon. Did you get a rise out of 'em this morning, Jimmy?"

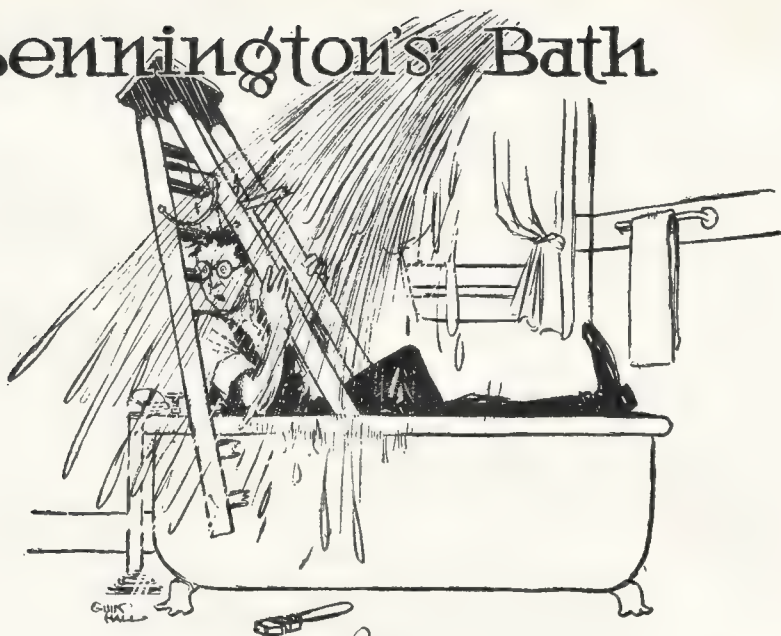
"I sure did! Say, Sam, let me tip you off to a line that has got hardware backed clear off the boards."

"What?"

"Cheese—that's what!" laughed Jimmy as he climbed into the bus.

"BUSINESS VERSUS MATRIMONY," another of Elmer Ferris' attractive stories, will appear in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Bennington's Bath



by George Allan England

A BIT of soap is a bad thing to have on your shoe when you're climbing a step-ladder in the bathtub, with a saw in one hand and a hatchet in the other. . . . Consider what happened to Bartholomew Bennington.

IT says right here," insisted Bennington, pointing at the prospectus, "that any man of ordinary intelligence can install it in a few minutes, himself."

"That means, of course, you'd have to hire a plumber," objected the Mrs. with decision.

"Just what d'you mean by that, my dear?" demanded Bennington.

"Nothing, love, except that prospectuses always lie. And I don't think we need this shower-bath, this winter. We've got on all these years, with just an ordinary tub, and brought up the children, and they've done well—though goodness knows, not always exactly as we might have wished. And we've never had any such luxuries—though no doubt it would be all very fine if we could afford it."

"Afford it!" snorted Bennington. "Of course we can afford it! The war's over now, and the H. C. L. is bound to fall. No well-regulated family can afford to be without this grand, glow-of-health device. Doesn't the prospectus say so? It only

costs seventeen dollars and fifty cents for the 'Squirto' model. No other expense at all. It isn't as if we'd have to hire a lot of skilled labor to put it in. See here! *'Full directions with every shower. Can be put on any tub in fifteen minutes, with nothing but a screwdriver and a wrench.'* Though I suppose a woman would prefer to use a hairpin! It's a cinch, my love. I'm going to have one, even if McGarrigle does have to wait another month for that fish-bill. We owe it to ourselves—"

"I'm glad we owe *something* to ourselves, Bartholomew," sighed Mrs. B. "We owe everybody else in town, already. That makes it unanimous."

Bennington peered at her a moment, sharply, through his round glasses. Then he jerked open the table drawer and took out paper.

"What are you going to do now, Bartholomew?"

"I'm going to write for one immediately. There's only a dollar to pay, down—"

"And how many to pay up?"

"Sixteen-fifty, of course! Can't you subtract? It's just simple arithmetic."

"Just simple bankruptcy!" she retorted. "Well, dear, have your own way. But don't ask *me* to pawn my rhinestone buckles to pay for installing it. And re-

member when the sheriff is moving our things out, I warned you, Bartholomew. I warned you!"

Bennington only sniffed, and reached for the pen.

"Be sure to have a Maxim silencer sent with it," directed Friend Wife.

"A Maxim silencer, Beatrice? Nonsense! Who ever heard of a silencer on a shower-bath!"

"Oh, I didn't mean for the bath, love. I meant for yourself."

Bennington glared, but held his tongue.

"Have your own way, dear," dug in the lady. "But please tell me which you would prefer—lilies, with 'FATHER' worked out in violets, or a wreath of immortelles with 'AT REST' in gilt letters?"

Bennington snorted, but found no rejoinder. Mrs. B., having temporarily captured the honors of war, retired to the kitchenette. And peace fell.

Peace, I mourn to say, ere long destined to be rudely shattered, as you shall see eftsoons.

THE "Squirto" model arrived in eleven days, express collect. It came Saturday morning, during the absence of Mr. Bennington at the office, and Mrs. B., though under protest, paid the charges. A mild resentment gleamed in her eye when Mr. B. arrived from the office at noon, chilled and hungry.

"Well, your bath's here, Bartholomew," she announced, severely. "And I had to pay two dollars and nine cents charges on it. I had two dollars and twenty-five cents laid up on the shelf for the ice-man, but had to use it. Please reimburse me."

"Of course, my love," beamed Bennington with a glad smile. "That's quite all right. But—are you sure there wasn't some mistake, though? Maybe the expressman was putting something over on you. I understood the shower was to be sent prepaid."

"If that's what *you* understood, of course it was collect," sniffed Beatrice. "Well, it's all right, anyhow. Lunch is ready, dear."

"Lunch can wait a few minutes. Where's the box?"

"You aren't going to open it now, are you?"

"Sure I am! Why not?"

"Can't it wait?"

"Probably. But I can't. I've got very important work at the office this P. M.,

and have to beat it back as quick as I eat. And I want to see what the thing looks like."

"All right, dear," she sighed. "Let the tripe and onions all dry up and get cold! It won't be *my* fault if you don't eat for a couple of hours, and everything's spoiled!"

"What d'you mean, a couple of hours? Think it'll take a smart man two hours to open a box and take a look at a shower-bath?"

"I didn't say it would—a smart man. The box is in the hall-closet, dear."

Bennington blinked through his round tortoise-shells and strode into the hall. Presently he returned with a wooden box that had been nailed up with a great many nails.

"If you'll clear away some of these dishes," said he, "I'll open this right here on the dining-room table."

"I'll be a self-made widow, if you do," she retorted, her eye lighting up. "You take that right into the kitchen, Bartholomew! It's bad enough to have your litter all over the kitchen floor. There'll be no excelsior on my dining-room rug!"

"Oh, very well, have your own way, precious!" And Bennington lugged the box into the kitchen. It thudded to the floor. Came a sound as of things being rattled round in a drawer. A tinkle of broken glass struck the lady's ear. A voice sounded:

"Where's that blistered hammer, dearest? I suppose you've had it, opening canned goods. If you'd only stick to hair-pins, and leave my tools alone—"

Mrs. B. appeared in the doorway.

"There's no particular need of your knocking my cut-glass carafe onto the floor," she rasped, "even if you *are* looking for the hammer you had out on the back porch, yesterday, putting up clothes-line hooks!"

"By Jove, that *is* so, too," admitted B. with a sickly grin. "That's one on me, darling. But how the devil can I remember all these petty little details? You've got nothing else to think of, but such trivial things. A man with a big, important business on his hands, like mine—"

He retrieved the hammer, and for a moment stood inspecting the box, which glowered back at him with a sudden, defiant air, as if taunting him with all its nails:

"I stump you! I dare you to try and open me!"

MRS. B., meantime, fetched a roll of absorbent cotton from the bathroom. From this she pulled a little, and began rolling a pledget.

"Huh! What's that for, now?" demanded Bennington. "Think I'm going to butcher myself, do you, just opening a wooden box?"

"Why, no, dearest, I wasn't thinking of you, at all."

"What the—hm!—then?"

"Oh, these are ear-plugs I'm making. A woman that's been brought up as I have ought not to hear any such language."

"As what?"

"As what you'll use before the box is open."

B. set his jaw tightly, and glared. Then said he, in a low, steady tone:

"I'm controlling myself, precious. But don't get me mad. Everything has its limits."

"Except your vocabulary, dear, when you hit the wrong nail."

B. laughed oddly.

"I admit," said he, "that in the past I *have* perhaps made some Biblical speeches during some of my amateur carpentry. But I don't intend to have it flung up against me that I can't control my temper. This is going to be different. See here, dear, I'll bet you anything you like that I do this whole job without uttering one single cuss-word."

"I'll cover that bet for one thousand dollars. Show your money!"

"Don't be absurd, hon. But I *will* make a deal with you. Every time I swear, from now till the bath is installed and operating, I'll pay you one dollar."

"Oh, affluence!" Mrs. B. clasped her hands and gazed heavenward. "Oh, Bartholomew! Fortune, fortune at last! Oh, my poor heart! To have lived all these years in modest circumstances, love, and then suddenly to become a millionairess—the shock will kill me!"

"If I *don't* swear, but control myself," went on Bennington, "you'll promise to cut out opposing me next time I want to make improvements and do things round the house. Is that a bargain?"

"Yes, love. But wait till I get a cash-register to ring up my receipts, before you begin on that box. What am I to do with so much money? I suppose I might buy the United States Treasury, or the Standard Oil Company, or some little thing like that, and—"

"And after all," added Mr. B., balancing the hammer in his hand, "it's a cinch to win a bet like that. A perfectly simple little job like installing a shower-bath that's all according to plain printed instructions and that a child could put up—why, nothing to it, love! Nothing *to* it!"

He picked a screwdriver out of the drawer of the kitchen table, set it to the box-cover and poised the hammer on high.

"Wait, please!" begged his wife.

"What for?"

"Till I get that cash-register!"

Bennington grunted with scorn, and smote. Then he grunted again, but this time not with scorn.

"D-d-d-da—dear me!" he moaned, thrusting a thumb into his mouth. "The d-d-da-da-da—ha-ha-hammer slipped, my love. Oh, it's nothing, nothing. It's all right! I don't need that thumb in my business, anyhow."

Mrs. B. sat down by the stove, with an expression of pleased expectancy.

"Sorry to have missed two dollars, that time," said she, "but it's quite all right, dear. It's only a case of deferred payments."

BENNINGTON smote again. The screwdriver sank between cover and box. Mightily he pried.

He remained helplessly staring at the handle, in his fist.

"To H-H-Halifax with these cast-iron five-and-ten tools!" he burst out. He couldn't seem to burst into the box, but he could burst out, anyhow, which was something. "Why in *Helvetia* d'you buy cheap junk like that?"

"You got that screwdriver yourself," Beatrice answered, "and besides, *Helvetia's* swearing, and you owe me a dollar."

"It isn't, and I don't. *Helvetia's* the Latin for *Switzerland*. But I refuse to argue with a woman!" His eye was beginning to look bad. Also his thumb was turning blue. "Where in *Helvetia's* the hatchet?"

"When are you going to get some new glasses, dear?"

"Glasses? What d'you mean, glasses?"

"Yours must be all worn out, precious. The hatchet's right in that table drawer. If it had been a bear—Oh, there's the phone. That's Mrs. Blither, to talk about the charity ball. It'll only take her an hour. You'll have time by then. But I'm sorry to miss all that money, dear."

Bennington clamped his jaw tight, as he took the hatchet. Then, watching his wife start for the phone, he said:

"You're a wonderful education to me, love!" He aimed a blow at the box, which the box didn't mind in the least. "The self-control I've developed, living with you, has helped me enormously, and—ow! Oh, my God-frey!"

"Shall I phone Dr. Tibbetts to have the ambulance call in about half an hour?" asked Beatrice. "Next time that hatchet glances onto your knee, it may take off the patella, or something. While I'm at the phone, maybe I'd better call him."

"I'm a dangerous man when aroused, Mrs. B!" retorted Bennington. "For your own good I advise you to withdraw at once!"

"Remember, dear, it's the box and not yourself you're opening," she smiled. Then—being really a prudent woman—she hastened to answer the phone.

"SHE said if the hatchet had been a bear—" exulted Bennington, anon. "But this *is* a bear! Oh, some bear! Beatrice, come here, quick!"

She returned, still smiling enigmatically.

"Well, what now?"

"Look a' that, will you, madam?" He pointed with glowing pride at the gleaming pipes, the shiny nozzles, the faucets marked "*Hot*" and "*Cold*" that lay on the kitchen table. The floor was deep with papers, excelsior, string and the shredded match-wood of what had once been a stout box.

Mr. Bennington's right hand tightly gripped nearly half a hatchet-handle. The rest of the handle and the blade lay hidden, somewhere. A bent poker, a stove-lid lifter and two flatirons seemed to have assisted in the demolition of the box.

"You don't need a hair-pin, do you, love?" queried the lady. "That seems to be one tool you've overlooked."

Mr. Bennington only grunted. He was by no means going to risk losing a dollar, by attempting speech at this moment. His collar and tie had got a divorce, *nisi*; his trousers bagged at the knee—they had been pressed only the day before; his cheek was smudged with dirt; his hair stood mostly on end; and his thumb looked parlous bad. But joy reigned in his eye.

"A bear!" he growled, combing a little excelsior out of his mustache. "Ever see a handsomer piece o' work than that?"

"Never, since Jimmy Randall went West, and I had to marry you or be an old maid. Jimmy *was* a dream, wasn't he? Yes, I'll admit it's a handsome piece of machinery. But it looks kind of disorganized, doesn't it? A bit loose, like! Are you sure you can fit it together?"

"Sure? Of course! What d'you think I am? An idiot?"

"Hardly that—yet. That's a pretty harsh word. Why go to extremes, dear? If you think you can do it—"

"Why the—hm!—can't I? Aren't the directions right here?"

He picked up a printed slip from the table.

"See this. '*First, connect the Gooptic-valve, K, with the Squeedinkus, F; then attach the Wobblejock, N, to the Rookamazook, B; then assemble these parts and add the Noblock-check, J, and the Niggle-joints, R-R. Then put on the Whangus, C, and—*' Why, it's a lead-pipe cinch!"

"I thought these pipes were all nickel-plated," put in the lady. "I don't see any lead!"

"Huh, think you're funny, don't you?" growled Bennington. "But that don't change the facts. This job is as good as done already. After you get everything fixed like this, here," and he pointed at lettered diagrams, "then all you have to do is fasten it to the water-pipes on the tub, and—there you are."

"Yes, there you are," assented Beatrice. "Only remember, we live on the sixth floor of an apartment-house, and while you're doing the attaching, you must respect the rights of many neighbors. Don't you think you'd better have lunch now, dear? The tripe and onions—"

"To Hel—"

"One dollar, please!"

"—goland with the tripe and onions! Nix on the dollar, love. I'm in on this job now, Beatrice, and I might as well finish it."

"I thought you said you had important business at the office, this afternoon."

Bennington confronted her defiantly.

"Well, so I have!" snapped he. "What's *that* got to do with it? Anybody'd think, to hear you talk, I was going to take about three or four hours to screw a few pipes onto a bathtub!"

"I'll phone the office you wont be down till Monday or Tuesday, dear, if you like."

Bennington glared horribly. His lips twitched, but he managed to articulate:

"I refuse to get annoyed at you, Beatrice. I am casehardened against your innuendoes. This job is going to be finished *now*. There's no use in my getting all dirty, again. No use making two bites of a cherry! I tell you I'm not going to eat, until I get this shower-bath installed."

"I assume your will's made?"

"Uh! You think this job's going to kill me?"

"By starvation, yes—if you stick to what you've just said. And if I've *got* to be a widow, well, it's nice to know that everything's all shipshape."

"That will do, madam! Here I am, trying to improve the home and put in a luxury, and you—you stand there trying to ridicule me. If that isn't just like a woman! Who's boss here, anyhow? If it comes down to brass tacks, who's head of this establishment? We'll have no more discussion, at all!"

BENNINGTON gathered up pipes, faucets and nozzles, and lugged them defiantly into the bathroom. Mrs. Bennington, with a sigh, set lunch for one on the dining-room table and prepared to eat.

"Remember, dear," she called to her husband, "I can hear you quite plainly from here, and every cuss-word means a dollar for me. There! There's a dollar, now!"—as a crashing clangor of metal burst, with language, from the bathroom. "Well, I've begun, anyhow!"

Bennington appeared in the doorway, sucking his other thumb. A wild light was in his eye. He peered a moment at his spouse, then clamped his jaw tight and stalked out of the apartment. Presently he returned with a stepladder, borrowed from the Eldens, downstairs.

"What's the idea, love?" asked Mrs. B., anxiously. "Going to put it on the ceiling?"

"It's none o' your particular business!" snapped Bennington, "but I don't mind telling you that the brace, Z-Z, has got to be screwed to the wall, at a height of eight feet, before anything else is done. I guess I'm competent to handle this job without any extraneous remarks!"

He disappeared into the bathroom with the ladder. For a while, Mrs. B. heard a *clink-clank* of metal, together with an undertone of remarks discreetly kept low. No doubt Bennington was making five dollars a minute, on the principle that a dollar saved is a dollar earned. After a while,

just as she was finishing lunch and carrying the dishes into the kitchen, Bennington once more departed.

This time he returned with a pipe-wrench, a monkey-wrench, a saw and a number of other tools. He looked pale and wan, but more determined than ever. Collar and tie were wholly gone, now; coat was off and shirt-sleeves had been rolled up.

"You don't mean to say the janitor lent you all those tools, for nothing?" asked Mrs. B., and drew a chair up near the bathroom door, where she could sit at ease and watch the progress of events.

"What is it to you, what I paid him?" snarled Bennington. "I had to go down cellar, anyhow, to shut off the water, so I got these tools at the same time. That's killing two stones with one bird."

"Dear husband," she entreated, "listen to reason! Let bygones be bygones! Forget and forgive! Before it's too late, before reason totters from her throne, *do* get a plumber, and—"

"Nothing doing!" he coldly repulsed her. "What? Be robbed by one of those outrageous pirates? Never, madam! I shall do this work myself, and save much money. Stand aside and let the work go on, woman, or I won't answer for the consequences!"

"You'll be responsible for monkeying with the water-supply, in case you make any mistake with those cut-offs in the cellar! What did the janitor say, when he saw you at the pipes?"

"The janitor did not see me! Do you suppose I'm such an idiot as to let janitors know every little thing I'm doing? Stand aside!"

With a strange, low laugh, Bennington peeled off his waistcoat, also, and departed for more tools.

BEFORE he returned, a peremptory knocking at the door summoned Beatrice thereto. Mrs. Harris, from Apartment 62, was standing there, and Mrs. Harris looked angry. She was a square, determined type, about twice the size of Beatrice. Beatrice quailed.

"Has that there man o' yours went an' shut off our water, down cellar?" demanded she. "I see him goin' down there, an' he had a wrench in his hand. Now I aint got no water, an' I'm half through my Saturday's house-cleanin', an' if it's him as has went an' done it—"

A door opened, down the corridor, and an irate voice vociferated:

"What infernal fool has gone an' turned on the water, here?"

Feet came hurrying, and Mr. Blake, from Number 65, broke for the elevator. Mr. Blake was a violent man, and had twice been in court for assault and battery with dangerous weapons—once a stove-leg and once a ham. Now he was pushing the elevator-button with frenzy.

"Holy cats!" he was erupting. "Just when we got them set-tubs disconnected for repairs! It'll flood the whole damn flat! What the Tophet is that doggone janitor thinkin' of, to monkey with them pipes just *now*?"

Beatrice began to tremble and turn pale. Mr. Blake had a wrench in his fist and blood in his eye. Hastily she withdrew into her own front hall and closed the door. Mrs. Harris, at any rate, now temporarily had some one else to lay the blame on. Beatrice heard voices of altercation in the corridor. That was *something* to be thankful for! But appalling visions of lawsuits, damages, torts, assaults, ruin and what-not—especially what-not—rose up before her distressed mind.

"Oh, Bartholomew, Bartholomew!" she cried in anguish. "Why *did* you try to do this awful thing?" No longer was she thinking of collecting one dollar per swear. All hopes of gain had been completely dispelled. Gladly would she abandon wealth, if only horrible losses could be avoided. "What, what *are* you doing in that cellar?" she moaned. She visioned her dear husband enmeshed in a tangle of infuriated pipes, like a modern Laocoön. Meanwhile conversation in tones of ferocity still drifted in through the door, till the elevator bore Mr. Blake downward.

"He'll kill my Barty, he'll kill him, if he finds out!" moaned the wretched wife, wringing her hands. "He's three times as big, and Bart's insurance has expired! Oh, oh, oh!" Distracted, she retreated into the kitchen, where she stood amid the litter like a feminine Marius amid the ruins of Carthage. "There'll be blood flowing here before water does, I know! Dear me, what *shall* I do?"

SHE was just about to run for the telephone, when Bartholomew's voice, husky, agitated, whirled her round.

"Gee whiz!" he was panting. "Say, that was a close shave!"

"What is it? What's happened? Did Blake attack you?"

"No, not yet. But Sanderson tipped me off, and I beat it out of the cellar just in time. I got up—the back stairs! There's hell to pay—don't charge me a dollar for that!—down cellar, believe *me*!"

"I won't charge you! That's all off, now. What is it?"

"Blake and janitor fighting! Janitor came in back door, just as I reached landing. I hid in closet, then beat it up here. Janitor—went down cellar. I heard the beginning of it. Blake said he did, and—janitor said he didn't. Blake called him a—"

"Skip that part! Do they know *you* turned on—off—"

"No! Nobody saw me. I must have got the—wrong pipes! Whew! But nobody knows. So it's all right. Why the devil don't they number their devilish pipes right? Not *my* fault, is it, if numbers mixed? But ours is all right, anyhow. I've got *ours* turned off, sure! So—whew! But that was a close shave, though!"

Bennington sank into a chair, exhausted with emotions and with the exertion of having rapidly scaled the back stairs. Six flights, on a run, are hard work for a small man accustomed to nothing more violent than a swivel-chair in a steam-heated office. He smeared a foul hand over a forehead, which thereby became streaky-black, and heaved a powerful sigh of relief.

"It's all right now, anyhow," he exhaled. "A miss is as good as a mile."

"I've known *some* misses to be a lot better than the mile between your office and this flat," returned Beatrice, "when you've got 'extra work to dictate' to that fluffy-haired Miss—"

"That'll do, love!" interrupted Bartholomew, sternly, as he stood up and made his way into the bathroom again. "Well, I suppose I might as well get this over and done with. Now that the water's turned off, the quicker I get the shower-bath on, the better."

And picking up the pipe-wrench, he fitted it carefully to the faucet-fixture.

"I'll take this off, and get the job done, my love," said Bartholomew with a wan smile. He seemed recovered a little from his fright. "You see, I've really got it almost finished, anyhow. There!" And he nodded at the nickel-plated pipes and nozzles now seemingly a coherent whole. "You

see *those* are all together. All I've got to do now is hitch the intake-gazingo to this pipe, here, where the faucets come off, and put up the brace, and—there you are!”

“Yes, I see there you are,” admitted Mrs. B., almost convinced. “Well, do hurry up and get it done, Barty dear. Done with, and the water turned on again, downstairs, before anything more happens. We can't afford to get into fights with all our neighbors, and everything, just on account of a shower-bath!”

“I'll have it all fixed in a jiffy, now,” asseverated Bennington, “and to-night—it's Saturday night, love—we can bathe in the 'new, sanitary, 20th-century way,' as the circular says on Page 5. Isn't it lucky it just happens to be Saturday? I'd hate like sin to wait. Now, if it were, say, Monday or Tuesday— By the way, I guess I'd better get the board up, for that brace, before I take this faucet quite off. We want to keep this work synchronized, you understand.”

“What's that mean, *synchronized*?”

“Say, don't you know English?” His scorn was complete. “But then, what d'you expect from a woman? Their only idea of tools is hairpins, and their vocabularies are about eight hundred words; and in job like this, they'd probably go to work and take that faucet off and leave the water running!” Bennington clambered out of the bathtub and seized the stepladder. “And yet they want to vote! Some world, this'll be, when they do—when the women run it!”

HE set the stepladder carefully in the tub. (Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.) Then he got into the tub again and climbed it. He did not know there was a little piece of soap in the bottom of the tub, and that this little piece of soap had adhered to his sole. Nay. However, Nemesis knew.

A pebble can start an avalanche. And if James MacDonald had done something or other to that gate, or something, at Hugomont, Napoleon would have won Waterloo. You all remember exactly the historical reference. Proving, of course, that a bit of soap is a bad thing to have on the bottom of your shoe when you're climbing a stepladder in a bathtub, with a saw in one hand, a hatchet in the other, a screwdriver in your teeth, a board under your arm and a metal brace between your knees.

Bennington had got the board in place on the wall, nearly up to the ceiling, and was just about to drive a screw into it, when the soap got in its work. There are only four hundred thousand words in the English language, none of which will quite do, just now. Anyhow, his person, considerably enmeshed in parts of the stepladder, landed back-down in the tub, while Mrs. B. furnished the obbligato to his oration and to the anvil-chorus of falling hardware.

Of course it must have been his heel, in a swift upward kick, that knocked off the nearly-unscrewed faucet-fixture.

Niagara, Jr., immediately functioned, all over everything.

“Hold it—blub-blub!—get that—glub-blub—faucet on again—gug-gug-gug—”

He went down for the second time, then, and remained submerged without even a periscope out, till he managed to fight clear of the ladder and come up for breath. Meanwhile the bathroom was filling rapidly, going down by the stern and giving evidences of being about to be *spurlos versenkt*.

Mrs. Bennington did not witness this. With screams she had run for the janitor.

Bennington, still in the tub, struggled through wreckage and heroically grappled with the pipe. Perhaps he was thinking of the little Dutch boy that stuck a finger into the dike. Perhaps he was recalling the infant Hercules strangling the serpents in the cradle—Hercules' cradle, not the serpents'. Just what he was thinking, we can never know; and as for what he was saying, that shall never, never be printed, so long as I am in charge of this story.

Bennington made a game fight, and the breaking spray dashed high on that stern and rockbound coast. But Bennington came out second-best. The human hand is no match for city-water pressure, driven by four large he-engines without consciences, at the reservoir.

Quite suddenly Bennington became aware of a startling fact—*viz.*, *i. e.*, *vide licet* and to wit: that Niagara, Jr., was getting swiftly warmer, and that warmer was turning into hot.

Just previous to hot becoming hotter and then hottest, Mr. Bennington scrambled out of the tub, with portions of the stepladder draped upon his person, and let her go, Gallagher. He admired poetry greatly, and would without hesitation have indorsed the old Norse Skalds; but the

modern, open-plumbing kind did not appeal to him.

From the bathroom, now billowing clouds of steam and in general assuming the aspect of Icelandic geysers,—Iceland was the home of the Skalds, you remember,—Mr. Bennington emerged on the run, shedding step-ladder.

"Shut off the—water! Hey—shut it—off!" he was shouting, as he struck the hall. "I didn't turn off—the right one! Hey, shut it off! Shut it—"

"Off!" vociferated the ireful Mr. Blake, just emerging from the elevator. "So *you* done it, hey?"

His remarks and fist landed on Bennington's ear, perfectly synchronized, so to speak.

After that, it was just war.

AND after that?

Oh, dear me, nothing much happened, except that everybody came, and Mrs. Bennington fainted, and the janitor couldn't find the right shut-off and once more flooded the set-tubs and the kitchen in Number 62, and the bathroom and all of Bennington's flat filled up with boiling water, and pretty much all the carpets and

furniture were ruined, and most of the paper came off, and an oceanful of water leaked down through five apartments underneath, and ran into the front hall, and out across the front steps and down them and across the sidewalk, and froze there, making beautiful stalactites and stalagmites as it says in all the good old descriptions of Mammoth Cave, and somebody pulled in an alarm, and the fire-department came, and a great crowd collected and jammed the street; and the cops came up and pinched two noncombatants for fighting, while Bennington and Blake, warned in time, escaped to the roof, and Bennington's clothes froze too, before he dared come down again, and a few other things.

After about an hour, a plumber was induced to come and shut off the water.

Bennington did not go back to work, that afternoon.

He expects, with industry and economy, to get everything all paid up by July 1, 1920, at so much—*so much!*—a month.

P. S. I don't know whether Bennington ever had a plumber install the bath, or not. I've never heard, and haven't, somehow cared to ask him.

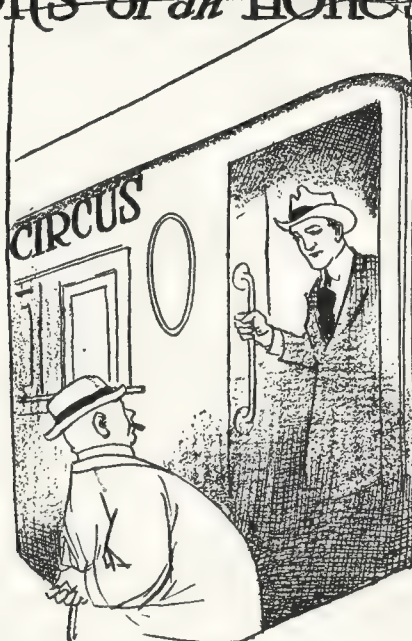
GENTLEMEN, MEET SENATOR LOGWOOD!

HE's a new character in American fiction, and he will greet you in the next issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, in the pages of which for some months to come you will find him looming up like a lighthouse.

No country on earth but America could produce the Senator, and no part of America, perhaps, but Texas. However, we'll let our Texas readers determine that. He's an operator in local and State politics with a method all his own. No one can put anything over on him, but he can put things over on the opposition with neatness and dispatch. The first story Chester Crowell has written of him will appear in the next number of this Magazine under the title—

"SENATOR LOGWOOD TAKES THE CASE"

Exploits of an Honest Grafter



Framing It For
Grassville

by William O. Grenolds

HONEST JOHN, the circus "fixer," here encounters a little problem in his trade and solves it after his own amusing fashion.

IN the circle of light from the shaded bulb above, Thomas R. Maxwell, otherwise the "Old Man" of the Mighty Maxwell Three Ring Circus, sat, humped in his chair, the butt of a cigar jammed into a corner of his mouth, his eyes tracing and retracing the typed lines of the letter before him. At every sound from without he turned anxiously to watch the door of his private car a moment, then disgustedly to restore his attention to the missive before him. At last, however, there came the scraping of steps on the car platform, and the grating of the door-latch, while the Old Man watched with eager expectancy. Then he grinned.

"Got a tough one," he announced to Honest John Barker, "fixer" for the Mighty Maxwell. That person carefully adjusted the tiny rug that he had displaced as he entered, straightened the crease of his trousers, smoothed his sleeves and broad white cuffs, then reverted to dangling the large lion's-claw charm which hung from his watch-chain. The grin faded from the Old Man's face. He was wrinkling and jerking the piece of type-written paper before him, and chewing at

his cigar-stub with the fervor that only a man who faces the loss of money can know.

"Sweat me in an oven!" he burst forth at last. "Sweat me in an oven if I ever have another general agent as long as I live! Hereafter, I'm going to run this show, I'm going to be the one that says where we go and how long we'll stay there. I'm getting tired of busting into towns that aint worth a wooden nickel and—"

"Pinch off a bit, ol' kid," broke in Honest John. "You're getting ahead of yourself. Course it may not be any of my business, but I don't even know what you're talking about!"

"Grassville!" roared the Old Man. "Grassville, that's what I'm talking about, Grassville—"

Honest John raised his eyebrows. "We aren't biled in there!"

"Aint we! Aint we!" The Old Man dropped the letter and pounded the desk with his fists. "Aint we! Four ways from the jack! It aint enough that they rob us blind last year, stick us up for city, parade and water license, let us get stuck on a bum suit and then charge us eighty prices for bustin' a cement sidewalk, to

say nothing of not giving us enough business to buy peanuts for the bulls; it aint enough for Happy Jordan to get us into all that mess last year, but now he's switched the route 'thout saying a word to me, sniped the bills with last year's dates, and stuck us in there again. Of all the robber roosts that ever existed, that's the worst, a cutthroat, stick-up, second-story burg, that's all!"

"Regular den of the forty thieves!" agreed Honest John, examining his lion's claw. "What's the excuse?"

"That he had to switch the route from Careysburg to Watertown on account of a washout, and so he put in Grassville to break the jump. Get that?" roared the Old Man, champng at his cigar. "Get that? To break the jump! For the love of jumping Jehosophat, how in the name of Hades will it help us to break the jump at Grassville? Huh? How will it? That's what I want to know, that's—"

"Don't ask me," chuckled Honest John. "I'm not your general agent."

"They'll stick us a thousand bucks cold for the license, five hundred for the parade, fifty for water and then frame up some bird to cabbage all the lots in town and make us fade him a couple of centuries before he'll even look at us," snapped the Old Man. "On top o' that, we'll get an attachment on the strength of the bulls making holes in the asphalt streets and draw a suit from some bird who makes his fifteen-year-old nag run away and then holds us up for damages to real, personal and imaginary property. Oh, I know that burg!" seethed the Old Man.

HONEST JOHN BARKER, straightening his coat-tails, as he settled into the wicker easy-chair of the stateroom, grinned genially.

"Some way or other," he said at last, "I take it you don't love Grassville."

"Love it?" The Old Man jerked his mangled cigar from his teeth, waved it angrily in the air, then jammed it back again. "Oh, yes, I love it—like the measles, or carbolic acid!"

Honest John was regarding the shine on his mirrorlike shoes. "How far is it to Watertown?"

"Four hundred and eight miles."

"About a thousand-dollar run."

"Just about."

"Well, why don't you make the jump? Run straight through to Watertown, get

there in the afternoon, lay over on the lot, let the natives get their interest up and do enough business the next day to make up for the lost date?"

The Old Man cocked his eyes. "Yeh!" he snarled. "Why don't I?" He jabbed a finger in the air. "I'll tell you why don't I. Because that triple-plated, copper-riveted, bone-headed bird of an agent has went and made the contracts—made 'em all, license, parade, water, feed, bakery, milk, balloon-peddlers, street-hawkers—"

"Guess that's enough." Honest John still stared at his glistening shoes, "but you've always got the right to cancel."

The Old Man's cigar waved in the air again. "Sure I have," he yelled. "Sure I've got a right to cancel. All the right in the world, on!"—and he gritted his teeth—"when I cancel, I blow fifteen hundred beans, bones, bucks, dollars for the privilege, that's all! That poor nut's went and paid a deposit on every contract!"

"Oh, gosh!" Honest John Barker slumped slightly in his chair. "I'm beginning to get next to why you sent for me. I'm to—"

"Get it back."

"And o' course that's a cinch."

"Cinch or not!" Once more that pitiable wreck of a cigar was jammed between crunching teeth. "I aint going to turn loose with no fifteen hundred bucks to a high-binding, bone-crushing outfit like that. I'll curl up and die first!"

"Better begin crinkling at the edges." Honest John's gray eyes sparkled. "I'm no sleight-of-hand performer."

"You're a fixer, aint you?"

"Yep!" The grafter rose. "I'm a fixer; but I'm no safe-blower. How'm I going to get back that cash?"

THE Old Man turned from his desk and regarded Barker coldly.

"What d'you suppose I'd be sitting around here fanning the air for if I knew how to do it?" he asked sarcastically. "They's a train leaving for Grassville tonight. I want you on it."

Barker moved quietly forward and took a handful of cigars from the Old Man's humidor.

"What's our date there?"

"Two weeks from Wednesday."

"The twenty-seventh." Barker glanced at the calendar. "I've got a fat chance!" A statement which still held good five

days later when Honest John Barker, fixer of the Mighty Maxwell, again faced the Old Man.

"Nothing doing," he announced.

The Old Man glared. "Couldn't you square it?"

"I couldn't," came readily.

"Did you try?"

"I did not."

"Huh?" The Old Man raised from his chair. Honest John waved a hand.

"Listen," he announced. "When a man's made a reputation for fixing, he isn't going to wreck it by going up against a bear-trap, is he, without taking a look at the bait first? That's me. I took a look. There's a deficiency in the municipal coffers of Grassville; they're filling it with cash from the Mighty Maxwell Three Ring Circus, Hippodrome and Congress of Wonders. And what's more, that's just the starter. What they figure on doing to us when the show really gets into town and on the lot would make an elephant weep. It's awful."

"It's worse than that," wailed the Old Man. "I aint going to stand for it, that's all. I aint going to stand for it. I'm going—"

"By the way!" Honest John was staring out of the car-window toward the show lot, where the first followers of the parade were beginning to flock to the midway, with its bellying side-show banners, its privilege stands, its hawkers and ballyhoo men. "A couple of things happened while I was coming down from the show lot that maybe you don't know about."

"Bad luck?" The Old Man creaked back in his chair. Honest John discovered a smudge of sawdust on the cuff of one trouser-leg and diligently sought the whisk-broom.

"Depends on how you look at it. Guess one of 'em'll jim up the performance a bit. Joe Carter just took sick. Fits or something."

"Ugh!" The Old Man stared at his desk. "How long's he laid up for?"

"Can't tell. Called a doctor, and he doesn't seem to be able to figure out just what's wrong. May not be serious—then again it may. He wont be able to do his act for a while though, so I notified the equestrian director."

"Thanks." The Old Man slid out the word by the side of the cigar he had just gritted in his teeth. "What else?"

"Well,"—Honest John studied his watch-

charm,—“after I'd gotten Carter stowed away, I took a notion to fire Soapy Mike.”

"What for?"

"Oh, personal reasons."

"Personal?" The Old Man's fist banged on the desk. "What right have you got to fire anybody around this show for personal reasons? What right have you got to fire 'em anyhow—huh? What right—"

"None at all," agreed Honest John cheerfully. "Only, I just took a notion to fire him, and I just thought I'd see if I could get away with it. And now,"—he straightened suddenly,—“that I've done it, what have you got to say about it?"

"I—nothing." It was the only answer the Old Man could give. John Barker was his fixer, his retreat in time of trouble, his salvation in more than one moment of stress. "Only, I don't see what you went and done it for. Soapy's a good boy, faithful and everything."

"May take a notion to tell you in the next day or two," said Barker genially. "Then, again, I may not. Might decide to see whether I could get away with that too. Besides, I've got something else on my mind. I want all the papers in connection with Grassville. And I want an order from you, effective the day before we get into that burg, that'll make me general manager, owner, proprietor, master of ceremonies and anything else necessary."

The Old Man straightened. "See your way out?" he asked hopefully.

"Out?" Barker stared. "No, I see my way in. I'm having a lot of funny notions since Joe Carter got sick, and the principal one is that the best thing for us to do is not to try to get out of showing in Grassville, but to insist on giving everything from the parade to the concert. And believe me, it's up to us to do all the insisting on the boards. So, while you're in the right frame of mind, just turn around to your desk and write that order!"

THUS it was that when the long trains of the Mighty Maxwell Three Ring Circus dragged their grinding way into Grassville ten days later, the tall, dignified form of Honest John Barker dropped from the steps of the managerial car almost before the brake-shoes had stopped squeaking, skidding in the cinders at the side of the track, then looping his tie on the run, hurried toward the sleepers.

"Razorbacks!" he shouted. "Out of those bunks and fly to it! Hear me?"

A sleepy-eyed form showed at the door of the gaudily painted car. "Only three o'clock," he mumbled. "The call aint till four!"

"Aint it?" Barker snapped. "It's right now—get that? Three o'clock, two o'clock, I don't care what o'clock! Fly back in that car and wake up those dope-heads! Get with it—get with it! We're up against something in this town—and everybody works! Out of your hop and unload those runs!"

On he went, to the big-top car, to the menagerie car, even to the cars of the performers. Time and time again he snapped the order that seemed fairly to crackle in the crisp air of early morning:

"Get with it! Everybody out! Roll to it! This show's got to be on the lot at six o'clock!"

Grumbling workmen grudgingly obeyed the command. Shivering in the chill air, the razorbacks humped their way along the tracks and began to pull the clattering steel runways from the flat-cars and thereby make the incline upon which the wagons and paraphernalia could be lowered to the ground. From the runways of the stock cars, sleepy-eyed hostlers, adjusting the harness of the pull-away teams as they came along, plodded forth, huddled in groups until the calcium flares and torches could be lighted, then hustled to their duties at the roaring approach of Honest John. Down the runs came the cook-house wagon, to be pulled into the street, while clattering teams were brought forward and hitched to it. The "skinner" clambered to his seat and released the brake. He fingered the reins and raised them. His lips framed the signal for the start to the circus lot, then reflexed. A form, with waving arms, had shown before him—Honest John.

"Nix on going to the lot," shouted the fixer. "Pull up a half a block, and wait."

"But this here's the cook-house wagon."

"Don't I know it?"

"But if it aint on the lot, there wont be nothing to eat."

"Who's running this circus?" Barker started toward the steel ladder of the wagon. "I'll take your place up there in a minute while the doctor patches you up. Now do what I tell you!"

GOGGLE-EYED, the driver obeyed. Honest John Barker whirled to the staring waiters, chefs and bus-boys of the cook-house crew.

"Tear up to the stake-and-chain wagon!" he ordered. "And make it pronto! I want to see every one of you birds lolling around here with a tent stake in your hand—kind of careless, in case of trouble. Understand?"

The eyes of a waiter gleamed. A grin spread across his unshaven features. "Oh, Gawd!" he chirped. "A Hey Rube! Me for them tent-staubes!"

But Barker stopped him.

"Nothing doing unless I order it!" he commanded quickly. "If you hear me sing out 'Hey Rube!' go to it. Not before!"

"I got yuh! Only sing, mister, sing!"

But Barker was already hurrying away. The wagons were coming off the runs rapidly now, and being hitched to their waiting six- and eight-horse teams just as quickly. The fixer rushed forward to give once more the order to pull only a short distance up the street, then to await developments. Again the drivers stared. Barker said only two words:

"Trouble—maybe."

Then he was gone, while teamsters cocked their eyes after him, stared up the deserted streets, then unlimbered the steel pennon standards, for use in case of necessity. As for Barker, he was at the performers' cars now, sending the men, one by one, to the stake-and-chain wagon, and once more voicing the command:

"Stall around. Get me? Stall around and keep those tent-staubes handy. But nothing doing without me starting it!"

He watched a moment, then turned down the track. Suddenly he wheeled, and regardless of the dirt and grime, clambered through the space between two flat-cars toward a group of men who were approaching on the run across a vacant lot. Fifty feet away from the cars, the fixer planted himself in their path and waited. Then as the first panting man sought to pass him, he caught his coat and whirled him back.

"Beg pardon, old fellow," he announced quietly. "I'm the bird you're looking for. Why the rush?"

The panting one gasped slightly, then looked anxiously toward the other members of the party. Pompously, an individual in a Prince Albert made his way forward.

"I'm the mayor of Grassville," he began. "And this is the sheriff of Grass County!"

He paused dramatically. Honest John Barker allowed his gray eyes to travel

from the toes to the hat of the somewhat diminutive officer.

"Well," he said quietly, "I've seen some worse sheriffs—and I've seen a lot better. What's eating on you?"

"I—"

"No levity, please!" It was the mayor, interrupting. "This is a serious matter. I want to know why you're unloading this show when I specifically ordered you by telegraph not to do it? Did you get that message?"

JOHN BARKER grinned and fingered his lion's claw.

"I'm an honest man," came his tantalizing answer. "Fact is, that's my name. Honest John Barker. I cannot tell a lie. I got your telegram."

"But—"

"Got it early yesterday morning. And to tell the honest-to-Henry truth gentlemen, it had almost as much effect on me as water on a duck's back. I've taken a strong urge to exhibit my three-ring circus, mammoth hippodrome and congress of wonders in your prosperous community, and I don't intend to let any peanut of a mayor—"

"Sir—"

"Well, I wont say you're a regular peanut. But then,"—Honest John gazed toward the sparse houses in the distance,— "it's a sort of a peanut community. It's to this kind of a place that a circus, a regular circus like mine, serves as a real blessing. It brings to your very doors an education in the craft of the acrobat, the glitter and glare of the tinsels and the wild savagery of the beasts of the forest and plain. The full iridescence of the grand, glittering and glorious parade, spreading its glory and sunshine—"

"We're wasting time!" The interruption came from a nervous-appearing person at the rear. "They've nearly got that first train unloaded. We'd better hurry with those examinations."

"Examinations?" Honest John's head shot suddenly forward. "What kind?"

"Medical." The mayor was talking once more. "I have brought down some physicians to determine whether or not it is dangerous to subject Grassville to contact with the—" Then he ceased, for Honest John Barker had moved suddenly forward, reached out and grasped the coat-collar of a somewhat undersized man who tried to hide behind the even smaller sheriff.

"Come out here!" And the voice of the fixer was gruff and hard. "Swing around in the light so I can take a look at you. I thought so. Soapy Mike! So you spilled the beans, eh?"

The little circus follower scowled. "What'd yuh think I was goin' to do— let you can me an' get away with it?"

"So you spilled the beans, eh?" Honest John Barker asked the question between his teeth, his hands clenching at his sides. "I've got a mind to—" Then with a sudden change of thought, he faced the mayor. "How many of these birds are doctors?"

"Four."

"Well, they got up too early. They're needing sleep. Send 'em back to bed!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" The chest of the mayor had suddenly expanded. He jammed one hand into the other. "This man Mike, or whatever his name is, has reported that this entire circus is in the throes of an epidemic, and as mayor of the city of Grassville, I don't intend to allow the citizens of this community to be exposed to it!"

"Maybe they've got it already!" Barker was grinning again.

"There's not a single case of any kind of malady—"

A DOCTOR broke in on the mayor's peroration.

"Mr. Mayor, he admits the presence of the affliction by his statement. I move that—"

"You move! And move quick!" Barker's grin had faded. "And either you start moving darned sudden, or you'll be helped! I'm not going to have any bunch of pie-eyed pill purveyors messing around with my men. Get that?"

"But—"

"That's enough. Take a slant over toward those cars. See that crowd of men? Every one of them's got a six-foot tent-stake with an iron band around the end of it. They can bust skulls all day and never crack a stake. And they don't want a doctor any more than I do. I'll talk to you, Mayor, and I'll even let that popgun sheriff tag along. I'll even stand for Soapy Mike. But those doctors beat it!"

"But can't you see the consequences?" The mayor's tone had changed now. "If we let this circus—"

"Let?" Honest John Barker's eyebrows heightened. "Listen, it isn't a case of let.

It's a matter of how you make me feel about it. I'm getting tired of telling you to send these prescription peddlers off the job, and I mean it." He pulled out his watch. "One minute. That's all. Then I'll call for a Hey Rube!"

"Oh, gee-lory!" It was the plaintive voice of Soapy Mike. "Nix, Mr. Barker, wont you? Not with that whole gang knowing I stirred up all this here. Nix, wont you—wont you?"

"Thirty seconds." Barker was holding a match above the second hand of his watch. The mayor fidgeted.

"Er—just a moment," he begged. "It's—it's still very early. In case of trouble or—anything, there is plenty of time. If I sent back the physicians, do you suppose that we—you and I and the sheriff and perhaps our informant here—could retire somewhere and talk this matter over, calmly and dispassionately, without the circus moving from the railroad yards?"

Honest John Barker snapped shut the case of his watch.

"Very calmly and very dispassionately."

"And the circus would not progress?"

"Not an inch—and my name's Honest John. Just send these bill-birds away. I don't like 'em. They make me nervous."

TEN minutes later, under the circle of light in the managerial car, Honest John Barker, his back against the partition, faced the mayor and his one-man staff. The executive cleared his throat.

"In the first place," he began, "please do not take this as an evidence of weakness on my part. I might as well tell you right now that I don't intend to allow your circus to play here to-day—"

"And I might as well throw it right back in your teeth," snapped the fixer, "that you've got about as much chance of stopping me as an air rifle in a barrage. But go on with your story. What's your holer?"

The mayor gritted his teeth; then he pointed to Soapy Mike.

"This young man has had the kindness to tell us that he was discharged from your circus just after seeing a performer carried away, suffering from some sort of illness. He then told me that the entire circus was in the throes of an epidemic."

"Like the performer had?"

"He didn't say so."

"All of which shows that he's an honest young man."

"Then you admit that there is an epidemic?"

Honest John Barker was silent a moment. Then he looked straight into the eyes of the mayor.

"You've put a question to me that I can't get out of. My reputation's built on the fact that I never told a lie. There is an epidemic on our show."

"Of what?"

"Coppeytis."

The mayor stared.

"It's catching?"

"Under certain conditions."

"How many have it now?"

"Practically everyone on the show."

AGAIN the mayor stared. He rubbed his hands together aimlessly.

"I—I'm in a rather awkward position without my physicians," he said at last. "I don't understand medical terms; naturally I know nothing of what we're talking about. Is it dangerous?"

"To be truthful—it is sometimes."

"Even leading to death?"

"I think I can say with all truthfulness that it has been the cause of much pain, anguish, and even death." Barker was talking slowly, coldly; his gray brows were close together, his eyes straight on the mayor. "I want to add right now while I think of it, that this was not the same thing that attacked the performer that our friend saw. Coppeytis is an old affliction. From what I can learn, it has existed for several thousands years; it has various symptoms and causes many complications; and—"

"And do you"—the mayor stepped forward—"intend to subject the municipality of Grassville to this thing, this—"

"I most certainly do!" Honest John seemed to flatten himself against the partition. "I didn't notice this beautiful community of Grassville sitting up nights to show my circus any consideration—and I'm not going to worry about Grassville."

"But I say that you wont play here!" The mayor was motioning for the sheriff. "I say—"

"I don't care what you say. We're here, and we're going to play."

"Not if I annul your license? Not if—"

"Think not?" John Barker smiled thinly. "That license doesn't say anything about epidemics or objectionable features. It gives us the right to play in this town

under any and all conditions. And here we're going to play!"

"But—"

"You heard what I said! You took our money and did everything but stick a gun under our noses to get it away from us. You gypped us for parade license, lot license, water license and everything else on the bill of fare. You wanted us to come in here—and believe me, we're here. What's more, we're going to show here, and if anybody in this town mingles with us, it's his own fault and we take no blame!"

"Not if you're under arrest!" The sheriff was edging forward.

BARKER only smiled the more.

"For what? Filling the terms of a contract? Listen, little bird's-nest, if you pinch me, I'll sue you until the cows come home. I've got a license and what's more, it's nonrevocable! Ever think about that? I've put up enough money in this town to buy the place. I got roped in here by accident, but I arrived by intention and here I stick. Unless—"

"What?"

"Well," and Honest John, noticing the gleam of dawn without, snapped out the light. "Every guy's got his price. Mine's ten thousand!"

"Dollars?" The mayor could only gasp the words.

Honest John Barker bowed. "Dollars," he repeated. "Good old round cart-wheels. Do I get 'em?"

There was silence. Patiently John Barker waited, but no word came. At last he raised a window and shouted for the trainmaster. "Bill!" he called. "Every one of those guys got their tent-staub's?"

"Yep."

"All right, we're going to show here—"

"Please—please!" The mayor of Grassville was tugging at the fixer's coatsleeve. "Think of the women and children. Think of the babies, think—"

"Think of ten thousand dollars, you dish-faced old highbinder!" Then Barker turned again to the trainmaster. "I'm going to give this bird in here just five minutes to return the money that I had

to put up for this town, together with a decent amount for two lost performances, in case we don't show here, altogether, about ten thousand bucks. Don't let anybody go uptown until that time. Then—"

"Wait—wait—"

"Then, if I give you the signal, turn 'em loose. Let 'em mix with the natives, and go anywhere they want to. Put fifty men with tent-stakes around each wagon to take it to the lot. If you get in a fight be sure to breathe in the native's face. Get as close to him as you can and—"

"Just—just a moment!" Again came the tug at the sleeve of Honest John. The mayor of Grassville, white, perspiring, pulled his sagging jaw into speaking position again and made vague motions with his handkerchief. "Just a moment. I've—I've reconsidered. Sheriff, go find the treasurer."

TWO hours later Honest John Barker stood chatting with the mayor, meanwhile watching the loading of the last of the circus wagons. Blandly he smiled at the executive and straightened his tie.

"You're going into quarantine I take it?"

The perspiring mayor bobbed his head. "Oh, yes—yes. I—is it always dangerous?"

"The coppeytis?" Barker smiled. "I'm still alive, aint I?"

"Yes, but—"

The trainmaster approached.

"All ready for the highball, Mr. Barker."

"Let 'er go!"

Barker swung to the step of the train; then as the engine's whistle sounded from far ahead, he leaned toward the mayor. "Just to be in keeping with my name, ol' kid," he announced, "I guess I'd better tell you a little more about that epidemic. You needn't go to quarantine. Everybody in your burg's got the thing already—in the most violent form, and just so you can explain it to the medical sharks, I'll give you the definition. Coppeytis—remember that. It's derived from two ancient Greek words: *copp*, meaning 'to get' and *eytis*, meaning 'the money.' 'Get the money.' And I got it. S'long!"

THERE will be another story of the "Exploits of an Honest Gaffer" in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Saturday Night Fever

THERE'S a certain something about Saturday night that's apt to send a young man adventuring. Here's a spirited story of an interesting fellow and what Saturday nights brought to him.



by Gladys E. Johnson

WHITTLESEA strolled across the office to Bob Holiday's desk and began poking for pens in a box which had never contained anything but elastic bands.

"Seen the new steno Myerfeld's got? Oh-h, la-la! Some babee!" He kissed the tips of his fingers ecstatically yet with a weather-eye out lest Rogers, the chief clerk, should look up from his newspaper.

"Class, huh?" Bob absently handed him a ruler, then vaguely opened and shut a drawer to appear busy.

"Well, I'll say so! Pure, dyed-in-the-wool blonde. I like 'em blonde. First name's Hazel, and I'm nuts over her already. Go in and give her the double-o."

"I'll do that little thing." Bob rustled the leaves of his ledger for Roger's benefit, and Whittlesea walked away with an elastic band he didn't want.

In the middle of the morning Bob went into Whittlesea's office on the pretense of looking at the files. While he idly searched for "Bernard" in the "S" file, he surveyed the new stenographer's profile. Whittlesea had not misrepresented goods. The new girl was decidedly easy to look upon. Neat and stylish, with a little demure way of raising her eyebrows when she talked.

That week, Bob did a lot of overhauling the files, a malady which appeared to have seized the entire male population of the outer office, at least the unmarried portion.

On Thursday afternoon, Bob, importantly gathering up a sheaf of bills, made his way to Whittlesea's desk. "Say, lend me five till Saturday, will you, old top."

Whittlesea looked over his glasses in well-simulated dismay. "Gee, I'm sorry, Bob. I'd like to, but I've only got seven and—well, I'm going to ask the new steno to go to dinner to-morrow night."

"Oh, that's all right!" Bob interrupted magnanimously. "But say, she wont go. I heard her tell Miss Bryant she had a date for to-morrow night."

"The devil!" Whittlesea's face fell, and his hand reluctantly slid into his pocket. "Oh, well, you might as well have the five, then. I should have spoken sooner."

As Bob departed, not with the five, but the seven, he called him back after ascertaining that Rogers had gone out for his daily shave. "Say, who's she going out with? Do you know? It isn't that simp Ferrell, is it?"

Bob retired behind Miller's stool, and his grin was impish. "No. It's me. I asked her last Tuesday, and I was wondering where I'd get the price."

He dodged the memorandum pad Billy Whittlesea threw after him and went back to his own desk chuckling.

THAT Friday night Bob took Hazel Sherridan to Techau's for dinner. They wound up with a dance at the Pavo

Real and that finished the seven. The next day, providentially, was Saturday and pay-day. Saturday is marked with a golden halo on the calendar of most young men of twenty-four.

That night they went to the Portola, joined a party of Hazel's friends down there who had come in a machine, and wound up at one in a beach café. The music stops at one in San Francisco, or they wouldn't have come home then.

Viewed that night, as Bob struggled into his pajamas, it had been a highly successful evening. Hazel liked him. After much diplomatic urging, and masquerading it as a judicious and dispassionate opinion, she had confessed it during a dance. She was easily the prettiest girl in the crowd, Bob reflected with a warm little glow of appreciation, and the jolliest. By golly, she was certainly good company, and when she talked with that little quick laughing note and her eyebrows rose entreatingly to you at the end of the remark, you just wanted to hug her for being so cute.

But the next morning his enthusiasm had cooled a trifle. The memory of Hazel, entrancing in blue crêpe de chine, was only a memory; the fact that fifteen dollars of his week's wages had disappeared—and part of that his rent money—was a hard, cold reality which hit Bob with its flying wedge, right between the eyes. Darn it! That meant he'd have to put off his tailor again and ask the manager of the hotel to wait a week. Bob hated to put off bills; it made him feel mean, but a fellow had to live somehow until next Saturday.

On Wednesday he tried to borrow back the seven dollars he had returned to Whittlesea, but Whittlesea, it appeared, had also gone out Saturday night. Life looked gloomy to Bob until Friday; then, cheered by the sight of another pay-day arriving and fortified by Hazel's undeniably friendly smile, he made a dinner date for Saturday night and had something to live for once more.

LIFE was beautiful that Saturday. Bob wore his best cuff-links to the office and that noon he slipped out and bought a new necktie,—price, one-fifty,—tying it killingly before the glass in the washroom. The whole office had taken a slightly brushed-up appearance. Bright neckties and best pumps bloomed entirely around the room and Bob found himself smiling in

sympathy. He liked Saturdays; the girls nearly always wore different suits and the wheels of business ran down. Only the married men failed to spruce up in anticipation, and the commuters, slyly consulting garden lists between the leaves of their ledgers.

Hazel had never looked prettier than in the white serge suit and Bob's heart swelled with vain pride at the thought that she had put it on for him.

It was the Tavern again, that night. At the little table in the corner which they were coming to regard as their own, Bob and Hazel faced each other over the chicken à la King and you couldn't tell them from the rest of the millionaires. To be sure there were moments when Bob nervously fingered those gold-pieces in his pocket, but these were never the moments when they got up to struggle with the rest of the room on the dance floor and Hazel melted into his arms like a white-serge angel. Then, though his best pumps were trodden to a pulp, and some one, apparently an amateur in the game, appeared to be moving a piano at his back; Bob was contented with his lot.

"Isn't it fun!" Hazel breathed impulsively when the orchestra stopped, evidently from nervous prostration, and the leader had pulled out sixty cents' worth of hair. The room ceased struggling for a foothold, and she pushed back the hat which had been shoved over her nose, in order to smile at Bob.

"Sure is!" the young man smiled back, applauding vigorously. "That elephant didn't tramp all over you, did he?"

"I should worry!" Hazel threw out airily. "You've got to take some blows in life."

Bob grinned. "Full of pep, aren't you, Haze? Ever get tired of this?"

"Not if the court knows itself!" she flashed back, and they both laughed in the fullness of their youth and in the excitement of each other.

"She was certainly one little queen!" Bob confided late that night, apparently to his pajamas. "No foolin', one little queen!"

BUT queens are expensive. The next morning the ways-and-means committee went into session after Bob's bath; the diminished and—alas—silver assets lined up on the bedspread. There was a little worried frown between Bob's brows. He

was beginning to discover that the only gold left after these Saturday-night sessions was the gold in Hazel's hair and his own fillings. Nine dollars isn't a mint to go through the week with; he'd have to put in an I. O. U. at the office about Thursday.

He put it in Wednesday. It appeared that some friends of Hazel's had planned a "dago dinner" at the Gianduja restaurant with a beach party to follow.

By Saturday Bob's finances were frenzied, but Hazel was serenely unconscious of that fact when she came down to the office and smiled at him that morning. She had on a new hat and Bob didn't have the moral courage to leave early. Instead they went to a show, and afterwards, though Hazel ordered lobster Newberg, Bob took a cheese sandwich and grew strangely silent on the homeward walk.

Sunday morning a rumple-headed young man hugged his knees and looked at his assets spread on the bedspread. They were dismally silver again and the rent was three weeks overdue. The mantle of a great disgust had fallen on Bob, and his world was lopsided.

To an expert eye, Whittlesea had likewise suffered financial shipwreck that week. Packing a ledger of two years ago, which Bob couldn't possibly want, he sought that young man's desk and transfixed him with a gloomy eye.

"Say, Bob, I'm strapped. Got any loose wherewithal in your jeans?"

Bob opened his ledger at random, and they bent their heads over it for Rogers' benefit. His laugh was a little bitter.

"Say, if I had five dollars I wouldn't speak to you. Billy, on the level, I'll have to hibernate until next pay-day."

Whittlesea's look was pained but not surprised. "You too, Brutus, huh? Say, I took a girl out Saturday night too. Aren't we asses! Fooey! All gone! You'd think I'd been dead all last week. She was a swell girl, but the lookers come high!"

Bob's tone was emphatic. "You said something that time!" and he stubbornly refused to raise his head, though Hazel passed through the room and her eyes sought his desk.

BOB'S grouch lasted all week. Whenever he was in danger of forgetting it and growing expansive, something happened to clip his growing feathers.

The manager of the hotel, between apologetic coughs, broached the delicate subject of the rent. Bob, though red about the ears, dismissed this airily. "Oh, sure, that's all right! You know it slipped my mind. We've been so busy at the office it makes me a little absent-minded. Sure! I'll fix that up Saturday—sure!"

The tailor was less delicately insistent, and toward the end of the week Bob became a patron of a dairy lunch and learned to eat off the arm of a chair.

Saturday he drew his money and later sought the cashier's desk. That long-suffering individual wearily reached for a pad and pencil and tossed it to the young man. "How much?" he asked, with his hand on the cash-drawer.

Bob flushed a trifle. "Not a cent!" His tone was explosive. "Say, Eddie, give me that last tag and take it out of this, will you?"

His manner was still defiant when he tore the I. O. U. viciously in two and marched back to his desk. Hazel, he knew, was trying to catch his eye through the glass partition of Myerfeld's office, and Hazel had never looked sweeter. But Bob's soul itched. He was going to pay his rent, hang it; to the devil with girls!

And he did. A great calm descended on his spirit as he pocketed his receipt that night and went to his own room. The sanctified feeling persisted until the telephone bell rang.

Bob, in the act of taking off his coat, stared at it belligerently for a moment. Answering that phone had cost him money before. Then he weakly capitulated.

"For goodness sakes, Bob, where did you go to! When I finished those letters for L. T., you'd vanished. I thought you were sick."

"Well — er — I'm not feeling extra good," lied the young fellow. "I feel a — a little weak." And he did—financially.

Hazel's voice was alarmed. "Are you very sick?"

"Oh, no, I'm not sick at all. That is — there's nothing to worry over. I'm just — sort of tired."

"Oh!" Hazel's voice was thoughtful. After a moment: "You're too sick to go out?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Hazel, I guess I'd better not. You see I might get to feeling bad—night air, you know, and everything — though of course there's nothing to worry over."

Hazel's voice was decidedly cold. "No, I guess not. Well, I'm sorry I disturbed you. Good-by."

"Oh, say, Haze—on the level, I'm feeling sort of rotten. Say—hello! Hello!"

He suddenly gave up the conversation and the receiver at the same time and viciously tore at his necktie. Darn girls, anyway! Gee, what unreasonable creatures! Now she thought that he had a date and wanted to shake her!

BOB got into bed, armed with a magazine as proof against any sudden ideas about going out. At ten-thirty he gave up trying to read and took to tossing from one hot side of the bed to the other. Funny he'd never noticed how still the house was before. Throughout the evening he'd heard people passing through the hall and using the automatic elevator. The elevator always went down full and came up empty. The whole house had gone pleasure-seeking, it seemed. Lord, wasn't it still! If only somebody'd laugh or drop a shoe or something! He'd never known the place to be so still before. He'd never stayed home on a Saturday night, his reason told him. Bob scoffed at that. Saturday night! Why the dickens did people have to run out just because it was Saturday night? They could act sane all week, but when Saturday night came around, they got the fever and rushed downtown to crowd into some café. Saturday-night fever, that's what it was! It came on early in the morning, increased during the day and raged all evening. The next day your temperature was down, but so was your pocketbook.

Bob was rather pleased with his phrasing. He repeated it to himself softly, out loud—"Saturday-night fever." The whole hotel had it; the whole office had it; by golly, the whole darn town had it! Hazel, now—she had it *bad*!

The thought of her made him wretched. She was such a good little pal if the fellow only had the money! Bob tossed to the other side of the bed. She was probably out with some other fellow. At the thought he started up to the phone, then lay down again grimly.

The elevator, rumbling by, woke him up. He punched on the light and blinked like a ruffled owl at the clock.

Two o'clock! The elevator was working overtime. Outside, on the street, taxis were whirling by with uncanny honks of

their horns. Bob punched out the light and sank back on the warm pillow with an ill-natured grunt. How inconsiderate people were, making so much racket at that time in the morning! Memory started to tell him that at this time last week he had been saying good-by to Hazel—he'd kissed her too, on the cheek; but Bob rudely bade memory shut up and went to sleep.

The next morning was an improvement on the ones which had gone before. Bob woke up with the virtuous feeling of one who has done a noble act. When his assets marched across the bedspread, one of them was a proud and glorious yellow.

HAZEL was distant, and Bob was dignified all week. It was an attitude adopted in self-defense on the young man's part. Never had the girl looked so pretty, and never had Whittlesea and Callendar hung about Myerfeld's office so. But the warm glow of that saved gold-piece offset her coolness and strengthened Bob's resolution. If Saturday-night fever burned up your money, you should cut out Saturday night. Bob's week, he had resolved, should end with Friday after this and resume again on Sunday.

He reaped his reward when he drew a full week's pay for the first time in months, and the absence of subconscious worry gave a new erectness to his carriage.

In the washroom Whittlesea stopped him and borrowed five dollars. With the borrowed five he took Hazel to a dinner, taking care to mention it casually to Bob, thereby evening up an old score.

After dinner that night, Bob sat in his room and marshaled his assets—all gold to-night, across the bedspread. The house gradually emptied. The elevator, which had done a rushing business between eight and nine, slowed between nine and ten and apparently gave up the ghost at eleven.

Bob noticed noises he'd never thought of before. The sight of his week's salary palled, and he put it away. He found himself waiting for the telephone to ring. The instrument wore an expectant look but remained maddeningly silent. At ten-thirty Bob went to bed, firmly of the impression that the city was crazy and that life on this planet was all a mistake anyway.

NATURE abhors a vacuum, even a good nature like Bob's. The glow of that unspent ten had faded by Friday and Bob

found himself looking across a cold and bleak plain which he had to cross to Monday. He was staying close to his desk these days. He didn't have so much to talk over with Whittlesea, and there was no need to hurry away at night. Once he even came back after dinner and finished a trial balance which he had been neglecting for a week. Rogers, rather surprisingly at his own desk, looked over at him in amazement but said nothing as Bob's head bent over his ledger. Work was proving an unexpected refuge.

But at four that Saturday afternoon the old gnawing began again. Hazel came down in a demure little one-piece dress of gray which matched her eyes and made her hair more gloriously golden than ever. Bob felt an almost irresistible impulse to go over and speak to her, but that sense of injustice rankling within him kept him glued to his stool.

At eight-thirty he was doggedly reading, and trying not to count the number of trips the elevator made, when the telephone bell rang, nearly upsetting him in his surprise.

Hazel's voice came over the wire; Hazel, a little pathetic and wistful.

"Bob, why are you mad at me?" She asked it as directly as a child might.

In spite of himself Bob was touched by that unevasive frankness. "I'm not mad, Haze," he answered as judiciously as the pounding of his heart would permit.

"You seem so, at the office," she persisted. "I wanted to speak to you to-day, and you turned away. What are you doing to-night, Bob?"

Bob tried to harden his heart, but his lips spoke in spite of himself. "Nothing. Why?"

"Do you want to take me out?" Her tone was warm, inviting.

Bob hesitated, looked wildly at his bath-robed reflection in the mirror opposite, groped for a decent excuse, bumped up against the overwhelming impulse to see Hazel again and finally spoke in a queer voice. "All right. I'll come 'round to your hotel for you in half an hour."

AS he dressed, his young face became grimmer and grimmer. His mouth closed in a thin line, then pursed reflectively as he pulled out his weekly salary, swollen now by twenty dollars snatched from the wreck.

It was still grim when he rose to meet

Hazel in the reception-room of her hotel, and not even the sight of her slim daintiness in the new gray dress caused it to relax the fraction of an inch.

The fog was thick in Geary Street, and Hazel pulled her furs closer over her thinly clad shoulders. "Where to?" she asked with a gayly inquiring look at her morose companion.

"Let's walk a few blocks," Bob answered shortly. She noticed his choice of direction in unspoken surprise. Bob had plunged into the fog, away from the ruddy reflection of the downtown lights in the sky. It was a full half-block before either spoke; then Hazel timidly broke the silence.

"Bob, you said you weren't angry with me, but you won't talk. What's the matter?"

Bob was struggling with himself, and his reply came a little explosively. "Nothing," he evaded.

"Yes, there is. You never call me up or speak to me at the office. I—I never called a fellow up before, Bob, and it makes me feel awfully to have you act like this, but I just didn't want to have anything happen to our friendship."

When he didn't answer, she forced herself to stumble on with burning cheeks: "Bob—why don't you act friendly?"

"I'm friendly,"—gruffly.

"Then why don't you act natural?"

There was a brief silence, broken only by the ring of their heels on the cement pavement. "Look here, Hazel!" Bob suddenly burst into exasperated speech. "I like you; I like you better than any girl I've ever gone with. You're a nice jolly companion, but—Haze, you're too darned expensive to take out! That sounds cheap. I knew it would," he went on in hot despair, "but I don't mean it that way. Anything within reason—but this road-house stuff all the time—I'm no Hetty Green! I'm making twenty-seven and a half a week, and I can't afford the gilded-youth stuff. It isn't that I don't want fun—gee, my Sundays are so lonesome they taste bitter! But these Saturday nights—well, they break me before I even start the week!"

He paused to catch his breath and continued a little more calmly: "I've done a lot of thinking in the past weeks. It looks to me as if the whole town had an epidemic—Saturday-night fever. People act sane all week; then when Saturday night comes

along they go mad, grab their best clothes and their best girl and beat it to the nearest cabaret. Sunday morning, they're broke and—oh, what's the use!"

THERE was a long silence during which Bob's disgust was almost tangible. Hazel finally broke it by placing her hand timidly on his arm. "And that was the reason, Bob? I thought you didn't like me any more—or that you were out with some other girl—" This last appeared to come against her will.

Bob snorted. "Girl! Girl's been my trouble! No sir, Hazel, I like you better than any girl, but it's just as I told you."

In the fog Hazel's eyes had turned to stars. There was at once something humble and something radiant in her face.

"Bob!" And the ringing quality in her voice turned Bob's morose eyes upon her, a little startled. "For goodness sakes, why didn't you say this before? Now we're talking plain, and we're not going to be embarrassed or silly. I like you to go out with, awfully; it would be silly to pretend anything else. You—you've been a regular pal. It wasn't fair to me when you dropped me without a word of explanation.

"You don't understand how it is with a girl. She does the things she thinks a fellow likes. Nowadays, most men want to be on the go all the time. Suppose, when you asked me to go to dinner the first time, I'd objected to Tait's and suggested some little chop house. Suppose instead of the Pavo Real I'd asked to go to a movie! Wouldn't you have scoffed at me in your own mind and thought I'd never been out much?

"A man, these days, wants a girl to look like a million dollars, and he wants to take her to cafés and show her off; then he blames her when his money's gone. Girls—most girls—would be willing to go to less expensive places, if they liked the man. But how can they? The man would think they were 'slow' or 'cheap.' One can't say things like this out of whole cloth, Bob, and you never gave me the opportunity to say it before."

There was another silence. Hazel's last earnest word had ended in a little quaver which hurt Bob.

Finally he spoke slowly. "I've been a self-centered ass, Haze. I ought to have my head punched!"

Hazel's eyes went wet in the darkness, and she turned her head away.

"I'm just saying what I think, Bob."

"I know it, and your thinking is a darn sight straighter than mine. Look here, Hazel. Suppose we cut out Saturday nights and celebrate Sundays—different sort of stuff. Oh, I've thought of it lots! Have you ever been over in Marin County? It's a swell place for a picnic. We can take a lunch—buy it on this side, you know, and some magazines and—oh, gee, it would be great. We could climb Tamalpais—or don't you like mountain climbing?"

"I love it!" put in Hazel rashly, never having tried it.

"Oh, Lordy, Haze, there's oodles of things and places to go! We could have the best time ever! Say—let's do it!"

ON Sunday morning, at the crowded Ferry Building, a different Hazel met Bob; a Hazel in a khaki skirt and white middy blouse; a Hazel prettily solicitous over the delicatessen lunch and bubbling with excitement.

Bob loved the whole world now with a glow as fervent as his own red tie. He found himself grinning like an idiot at other fellows meeting girls. Everyone seemed fresh and expectant. You knew, just to look at the laughing couples, that they'd received their full quota of sleep.

The sun shone for Bob and Hazel; the bay was a dancing blue for them, the Marin hills were yellow and inviting for their special benefit.

The next day Bob looked through the glass partition of Myerfeld's office and took a foolish pride in the fact that Hazel's nose was sunburned and that he proudly bore the complement to it.

There was no bleak plain looming at the end of that week. Instead Bob and Hazel climbed Tamalpais, starting when the day was fresh and the shadows lay long on the ground. Mill Valley was a little garden spot of roofs, cuddled in the hollow at the mountain's base. Enough of a breeze tingled through the air to paint whitecaps on the blue bay and stir the mountain laurel. The madroñas, those harlequin trees, were bursting their flaming red bark to show the fresh green beneath. New vistas came to view with each turn. Four counties stretched beneath them; San Francisco rose in gray, cloudlike hills across the bay.

They came down when the western sun was striking fire from thousands of win-

dowpanes across in the great gray city. The ferryboat was crowded with others as dusty and weary and happy as themselves: hunters, from the marshes of Marin; little girls with golden poppies drooping from tired hands; hikers in khaki. Laughs and the droning cry of sleepy babies melted into a strangely soothing note. A quartet, with more energy than voices, started close harmony on the forward deck.

A weight on his shoulder roused Bob from his contented lethargy. Hazel had fallen asleep. He shifted her to a more comfortable position, and she woke, unembarrassed, only when the boat pulled into the San Francisco slip. He regarded her tenderly as she straightened her hat and smiled rosily up at him.

There was something very sweet and unaffected in this out-of-door companionship.

Bob did not kiss her good night now; but somehow his handclasp meant more.

The sun went down on a perfect day.

THE row of assets was always yellow now, as they marched across the bedspread on a Sunday morning, and there was one more of them. Bob had been the only one in his department to get a raise, and this fact, more than the money itself, had proved the rod which struck the fountain of his ambition. He was aware of Rogers' eye on him often during the day. He knew for a fact that Rogers had spoken—and complimentarily—of him to the big chief. Rogers was slated for a branch managership, Bob knew. He would have to have an assistant. Lord, that might mean—why, it might mean a branch managership some day for him! Good old Rogers, he did recognize honest work, at that.

"One hundred dollars—Haze! One hundred solid bones—and since May!" he exclaimed exultantly one Saturday night as they bought their picnic lunch. "And if I go with Rogers—gee, I'll really amount to something!"

"Bob!" Hazel clutched the Saratoga chips regardless. "Do you honestly think you'll have a chance at that Mission branch? Why—why, that might lead to something big!"

Bob rescued the chips. "You bet it might! Here—catch the sardines, will you? They're swimming away."

He unrolled his cherished plans as they walked back to her hotel. The stars were

large and bright this night, but the moon was apparently on a furlough. The entrance of the vacant store, where they always paused to say good night, was velvet black. Bob interrupted himself in a verbal flight to peer through the dark at the girl. Her eyes were shining on him like stars.

Something in her expression made him falter—something in the eager face and radiant faith that gripped him by the throat.

Both hands were filled with packages. For a wild moment Bob clutched them in despair; then their clatter awoke the street and caused a neighborhood dog to bark sharply. Bob found that he had clasped the girl and the Saratoga chips in his arms and was pressing his cheek to hers very fondly.

"You dear! You little old dear! My gracious, Haze, I'm awfully in love with you!"

For one startled moment Hazel drew back, the chips crackling dismally under the fervor of Bob's embrace. Then the bag slowly slid to join the rest of the menu on the floor.

SAN FRANCISCO'S climate is a temperamental young thing. While the East is smothered in a bloom of May lilacs, she starts to get fretful. At rose time she is working herself up into a tantrum, flinging handfuls of dust about her streets and blowing rudely and derisively down your neck. During July and August she is really unbearable, first hooting around street-corners at you or pouncing on your best hat, then sulking in a cold and bilious fog.

In September she cheers up; by October she is smiling, and in November and December—probably in anticipation of Christmas—you wouldn't ask for a nicer-behaved climate.

This December Saturday night, it was beautiful. The lights had bloomed early, but there was the balm of spring in the air. A few hardy roses bloomed in the small patches of old-fashioned gardens. Bob joined Hazel as she left the office, and they picked their way through the crowded streets.

"I deposited the rest of the money," he announced exultingly. "That's a hundred and fifty, Haze. Doesn't it mount up! At this rate in three months I'll have two hundred. They say it's the first thousand

that's hard to get, but it isn't for me with a little brick like you helping."

Hazel's gaze remained straight ahead and her silence persisted—a strange thing, if you knew Hazel.

Bob steered her between a couple of approaching autos. "Want to go to Harry's Grill?"

Still Hazel was silent. Suddenly she wheeled on the young man, and her eyes were almost defiant. "I don't want to go to Harry's or any place like it to-night, Bob. I—I want to go to some nice place."

"But Harry's—" Bob was beginning in amazement. "You said yourself that we could save more—"

"I know I said it, but I'm not saying it now. I—well, to tell the truth, Bob, I'm tired of holding down. I want to go—to Tait's!" she finished in a rush.

Bob did some mental arithmetic. He wouldn't be able to put so much away this week, but—"All right, honey," he said evenly, "I'll take you."

HAZEL'S manner was puzzling as she seated herself in the big café. It was almost defiant, with a petulant defiance which had Bob completely at a loss. She ordered recklessly, and Bob mentally subtracted more from the amount which would go into the bank. When he came to pay the check, he quietly avoided thinking of what he had intended to put in.

"Bob!" Hazel's voice cut into his thoughts. "There's Stan Winton and Edna with another couple, over there by the post. Speak to them. Tell them to come over!"

"But we've got to get the things for to-morrow," Bob objected. Stanley Winton, in the vernacular, always "got his goat."

"Oh, drat the things for to-morrow!" Hazel was frankly impatient. "Call them over, or I will!"

The other four were loudly elated at joining them. "Say, this is luck!" Winton burst out. "We've got the car outside, and we're going to the beach. You've got to come along."

Bob's mouth tightened a trifle, and his eyes sought Hazel's, waiting her expected objection. To his surprise her glance evaded his. "Of course we'll come," she said, and there was a determined ring in her voice. "Excitement is my middle name to-night!"

Winton was entranced. "Little Miss Pep! Atta girl! Keep up the good work!"

He leaned over to pat her shoulder familiarly, and Bob felt his blood boil.

"Say, we're going out to-morrow, early. We'd better think about slowing down," he began with careful good humor.

His objection was drowned in a mock groan and Hazel's scornful "Oh, Bob! Don't be a kill-joy!"

Down into San Mateo County they dipped for a visit to its road-houses. Some one suggested chicken, and Hazel joyfully put forth the suggestion of Palmyra Lodge.

Bob, jammed in one corner of the seat, was both hurt and bewildered. A little of this stuff he could understand, but Hazel's recklessness— Under the cover of a general laugh he placed one arm about her shoulders. "Hazel, what is it, dear? It's so late, and too much of this gets tiresome."

For a long moment the girl regarded him through the gloom, and her lips parted; then she petulantly drew her hand away.

"It isn't tiresome to me, Bob. It's—well, it's the sort of thing I really like. I don't care!" she answered his look of amazement. "I've got to have excitement and—all this. I do like it, and if you want me, Bob—you'll have to put up with it!"

After the words were out, they appeared to frighten her. She looked at him a little aghast as they rumbled along in the dark. The laughs and voices of the others seemed very far away. Bob's face had not changed a muscle, but a bleak expression came into his eyes.

Hazel tried to wrench her gaze away, but it remained fixed on the young man's hurt face.

Then, very slowly, as though he was renouncing something, Bob leaned down and kissed her lips.

THE next morning there was no procession of assets along the bedspread line of march. Instead Bob took out a bank-book and studied it seriously for a long time.

The next Saturday night Hazel expressed a desire to visit the Cliff House, and they stayed there until it closed. That night there was no sum set aside for the bank. Instead, the next morning, Bob drew a check.

Christmas week was a wild revel. The general excitement of the city appeared in Hazel to mount to a fever. New Year's eve ate off a substantial part of the bank

account. Bob was beginning to realize that he had been spending like a piker compared to this new set they were now going with.

Throughout January the merry-go-round went on. Bob's manner toward Hazel was as tender and considerate as before, but lines had come into his forehead lately and a hurt look into his eyes. Even the knowledge that he had been made Rogers' assistant on the new job failed to bring the acute delight he had once thought it would. That night, in a café, he told Hazel of his appointment.

For a long moment the girl stared at him, and he was humbly grateful for the unfeigned delight which flooded her eyes. "Oh, Bob, you know I'm so glad!"

Bob reached for her hand under the tablecloth, thrilling to its slender warmth. "Hazel—dear, hasn't it been indefinite long enough?" His voice was vibrant with tenderness. "Will you marry me in April, dear?"

The girl's eyes remained fixed on his; then to his dismay they suddenly filled with tears. But the next minute she was on her feet imperiously bidding him dance with her. Only when they had gone nearly around the room, did Hazel speak:

"April's all right, Bob. I guess I can get my things ready. We'll come out here for a wedding supper?"

Bob looked around involuntarily at the flushed, laughing crowd. Anything less sentimental would have been hard to imagine. Then he replied, holding her close for a moment: "If it will please you, sweetheart."

A SUDDEN convulsion shook the girl; she abruptly stopped dancing and started for the entrance. "I've got to get outside. I—I feel smothered!"

In alarm he followed her into the cool night. The sky was studded with stars; the ocean wind fell gratefully on their flushed faces. Hazel hurried around the rows of waiting machines, never stopping until she had crossed the highway and had mounted a sand-dune where one could see the ocean. When she spoke, she did not look at him. "You'll let me have all this I want, the cafés and dancing and all? I—I've got to have excitement and good times, Bob."

"Dear,"—Bob's tone was a solemn

promise,—"I'll try to give you what will please you most. I love you, Hazel."

There was a solemn pause. A little wind wrapped Hazel's skirts about her slender body; the bunchgrass stirred restlessly. Then, to Bob's horror, her face began to work like a child's, and suddenly wrenching her hand from his, she ran down the dune.

He caught up with her at the bottom and took her in his arms. "Hazel! Sweetheart, what is it?"

He touched her face and was horrified to find it wet. With one hand he dug in his own pocket for his handkerchief. "What is it, dear?" he repeated, mopping her eyes with more vigor than skill.

"Don't! Don't, Bob!" She drew back with a little hysterical laugh at his clumsy manipulations. "I'm all right, but—you'll hate me! Oh, my dear, I think I must have been crazy! I was *jealous*, Bob."

"I wanted you to save; I was glad—I was proud, when you did. But—oh, Bob, I thought that was why you liked me. I got it into my head that you went with me because I was—cheap to take out!"

"Hazel!"

"Oh, I know it was awful!" She wrenched away at the pain in his voice, and he walked after her rapidly until he forced her to stand still.

"I know I'm a nasty wretch, but I told myself I'd test you, like girls do in books. I told myself I'd find out for sure if you really loved me as a girl—or just to help work. Oh, Bob!"

THE lines were smoothing from Bob's forehead. He held her tight in spite of her shamed struggles to escape. "Thank the Lord, dearest, we're talking plainly again! Whew, what a relief! I thought you had Saturday-night fever. I did, Hazel. I thought it was chronic, and I tell you it hurt. But, dear, I wanted you. I was going to get you if it took my whole bank account. You mean a thousand times more than the money or the job."

Hazel's nose was flattened against his shoulder, and her voice was choked when it came. "But you know better now? You know I haven't got it?"

Bob gave her a tender and exasperated little shake. "Of course, you dear little idiot, I know now that it's only a screw loose!"

"WITHOUT WIRELESS," another striking story by Gladys Johnson, will appear in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

George's Atavism

MAYBE you've got it too. Anyhow, you'll certainly enjoy this very Texas story.

TO look at George, you'd never know he has atavism. But that's what he's got. That's how I happened to be able to drag him to New York and give him a— No, I didn't give him anything. What I mean is that on account of his atavism he came to New York. All I did was suggest it. And now he has made good.

Atavism is a peach of a word. I just discovered it the other day. It's a dictionary word. What I mean is, there's no use knowing anything about it ordinarily; you don't use it to sell goods. But it tickled me to see that word grinning at me in the dictionary, because until that moment I had thought I knew something there wasn't any word for. In the dictionary, right after the word *atavism*, it says: "Recurrence or tendency to recur to an ancestral type."

George and I went to school together in a little Texas town that I will not name, because I want to tell the truth about it. I might want to go back there for a minute or two some day. When we were boys together, there in the old days, the natives used to shoot at the passenger trains at night just for the fun of it. They are very civilized now, and they wouldn't pot-shot a fellow unless they had a grudge against him. Shooting a fellow just because he is riding on a train is considered crude entertainment.

This was not a cow-town and is not a cow-town. It is off to one side of Texas where the early settlers stopped after their long overland trips from Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi and other places. They settled down to a peaceful life of farming and feuds that was very enjoyable. As long as the ammunition held out, a good time was had by all.

When a homeseeker came there in the old days, the pastor would welcome him



By Chester T. Crowell

to "this land of peace and plenty." After the pastor had made his speech, the citizens would take him off to one side and present him a shotgun and some buckshot and ask him which side he "choosed." If he didn't choose either, they put him back on the train.

They were strong on genealogy there. In order to get a grasp of the local situation, you had to know which family's grandpa was killed by the grandpa of which family, so you could always be particular about what you said. Little matters like this were very important in arranging church-pews, or in the kissing of babies during political campaigns. It was a right interesting situation, and for a small town, the place was not very dull. My pa was the minister, and that let him out of the fights. He had to handle the funerals for both sides. Both sides were represented in the congregation. That's how it happened that once the church was shot up. But that is another story, and I am not telling it here.

The folks used to promise Pa every now and then that they'd call it off and let bygones be bygones, but they couldn't decide when the armistice went into effect. Everybody wanted to be even when peace was declared. The trouble was that a community like that just naturally puts gunpowder and black coffee in the nursing-bottles, and they had a generation of

folks by this time that didn't know how to conduct social intercourse any other way.

NOW, you take a place like that, and it's hard to imagine George coming out of there the sort he is. But George had an education. The school there was just as bad as you'd expect, and George didn't go to college. People come by their educations in different ways, and the way George came by his was to walk into some hot wood-ashes and burn the bottoms off his feet so that he couldn't do anything but sit down for the better part of a year. He put in that time reading good books. He got the habit and never quit. But when he came out, he was a different boy. He was kind and gentle, and could win more battles with what he said than the rest of us could with a club. We were afraid of him and didn't know why. He was just as different from the rest of the people there as if he had lived in another country.

His pa was one of those long, lean, black-eyed fellows, and he let his hair grow down the back in the winter-time so he wouldn't catch cold. He wasn't dressed up until he had put on one of those collars that don't rise a quarter of an inch above the shirt-band, and had hitched on his six-shooter. If it was an extra special occasion, in addition to his white collar he would wear a black necktie that looked like a shoe-string. That was George's pa.

George got away with this gentle stuff better than I ever expected. He finally got a job in the general store, and the people still let him out of all fights and didn't seem to expect him to take sides, not even with his pa. On account of his having spent so much time in bed, they regarded him as sickly. The idea that he might have got well never seemed to spread even five or six years after the accident. George didn't look sickly, and he certainly was active. He worked harder than any two men in the town. He had a horse and buggy, and he dressed well, and he was saving his money. Keeping friends with both sides, no wonder he did well in the store. Whenever there was a disagreement about an account there, George would say: "Well, now, I reckon you must be right about that. You tell me all about it, and then I'll tell you the way I thought it was, and I reckon we'll find right off how come some one to be wrong." That kind of talk nearly knocked those fellows down. They'd listen to George,

and then bat their eyes a couple of times and say: "Hell, it don't make no difference, nohow." And that was the end of the argument. I always remembered that about George, and when we wanted a man who could smile with his eyes, all the time, no matter what happened, I thought of George. That's how I happened to go after him. He's a wonder. He's the kind of fellow lost kids go to and stray dogs expect help from. And once let a woman get an earful of that drawl of his, and she just takes possession of him. But George isn't any angel, either. He has just eternally got the dope on how always to leave them smiling when he says good-bye.

GEORGE never had any use for the feud stuff; he kept his mouth shut about it; he had it figured out as a waste of time. Well, one day a fire-eating citizen with warts on the back of his neck and a bottle of gin in his pants pocket, came into the store and talked rough to George. I don't know what all he said, but he seems to have called George some very picturesque things, as they say in the summer-resort ads. He made the kind of speech that went with his make-up—ten-twenty-thirty stuff; do you get me? Our hero ought to have bounced the cornerstone of the courthouse off his ear at the close of the act. Instead of that, this rough-house specialist did all the talking while George just stood there and smiled at him. There was no fight. This wool-hat person made his speech and waited the customary one minute for action; then he went out.

As for me, that's about what I expected George would do under the circumstances. He was a superior sort of person who couldn't expect to be helped any by his book-learning in a fight like that, and might get his whole head knocked off. When I heard about it, I figured out that George was probably glad it happened with some of the local sharpshooters present, so he could give them an object-lesson in how to end the feuds. If such a thing had happened to anyone else, he might as well have moved out of town by night, but George was always considered in a class by himself, and people figured he had a right to consider such cattle beneath insulting him. Some of the citizens thought they ought to go and drag this fellow up and down the road for an hour or so just to teach him how to act with

a gentleman. They didn't hold anything against George for not fighting; even George's own pa didn't make any of his usual comments on the subject. He was resigned to the fact that nothing more could be expected from George. George was regarded as a born neutral anyway, and folks actually resented anyone coming along and hurting his feelings. Considering the whole situation, I think George did one of the best things he could possibly have done for that community. It put a new idea into their heads. They didn't admit anything then, and they didn't immediately change their manner of living or dying, but they had a new angle. Do you get me?

But here's the queer part of it all. After that day in the store, George wasn't himself any more. He quit going with the girls, and then he didn't take as good care of his clothes as he used to. One day some boys from a neighboring town came to our town to call on some girls, and we boys gathered that night to throw rocks at them as they left. This was always done in that section, and to neglect it was considered—well, no one ever neglected it. The visiting boys *would* have been disappointed if we hadn't rocked them. George said he was tired and sleepy and didn't come out for the fun. Within another six months George was stoop-shouldered. And he'd let his buggy stay muddy for three or four days. He was as polite and as kind as ever, but you could tell that something was the matter with him. People began telling him what was good for malaria; nearly everybody down that way has malaria. And old ladies said they thought he was going into a dee-cline.

INSTEAD of buying a farm like he had always intended to do, George finally sold his horse and buggy and took his money out of the bank. One day he moved away without saying good-by to anybody. He just walked to the station and took the train to Houston. And the funny thing about it was that everybody in town would have been glad to shake his hand and wish him prosperity. He was the only man that ever left that town that could have had a brass band at the station—if we had had any brass band.

I left not long after that. I was just a big-mouthed kid, and I told everybody that I was going to New York and knock 'em cold. It's a wonder I didn't take a west-

bound train, but I didn't. The populace laughed itself wabbly in the knees about my case. I must have cured about ten chronic malaria cases just by giving those people the laugh-cure. I had more brass and less sense than nearly any other kid in town. And the Lord knows we had some solid ivory there. Well, I came on to New York and starved to death eight or ten times, and finally got wise to how things run, and now I'm getting along fairly well.

When the time came to hire a man who could glad-hand the French ambassador out of his eyebrows,—you know what I mean, one of those morale specialists, the sort of fellow who can tell you there is not a leaf stirring for credit, and then sell you a bill of goods with sight draft attached,—I thought of old George. We needed the sort of man who could make the employees think that a soul-less corporation has a soul, and give our customers the impression that this is an institution with a spirit and ideals. Get me? We wanted to be on the level with all this stuff, of course. We can afford to now.

But you know me—I can't get that kind of chatter across. I can be as square as they make 'em for six hundred years, and whenever I sign up a contract with a customer, he wants me to roll up my sleeves and let him look under the table. We are running a high-class business and dealing with classy people; and I needed George to represent the class. I'm the kind of fellow that if I give the employees a raise, they wonder if I have just stolen the courthouse, or maybe I want to sell them something. I knew exactly what I wanted, and I knew George had it. Of course, he didn't know New York, but he's the kind that learns quickly—and then there was a lot about New York that I didn't want him to learn. You get me? I didn't want a New Yorker in this job. I wanted George with his "how come" and his "I reckon" and his drawl. That fellow is so honest he could sell the Statue of Liberty to the Secret Service Department, just on his face.

WELL, I went to Texas and found George in Houston, working for wages. He looked just about like he did when I saw him last, except he was a little more stoop-shouldered. His complexion was slightly more sallow. The old energy was there, and the quiet way, but still he

didn't suggest energy, to look at him. He moved around all right, but he didn't give you the impression of reserve strength. Moving around seemed to represent more effort than in the old days. Somehow, something had cracked in George, and he must have decided once and for all, the day he left town, that he'd never amount to much.

I told George I wanted him to come to New York and put his name on the pay-roll. He said he didn't wish to hold a friendship-job like that. I almost laughed. It was the first time in my life that anyone had accused me of traveling halfway across the continent to put a charity case on the pay-roll. No one else on earth would ever have looked at this face of mine and suspected me of any such conspiracy against myself. It showed George was the same old George. After that, I wanted him more than ever.

Finally I made him quit saying that I was offering him a living for old times' sake, but then he didn't know whether New York was a nice place to live. What do you know about that? Now, you take a fellow like me, and it's hard to meet that argument, because what I want to do is wring my hands and rush madly out into the fresh air. But I told him that some six million folks stick around New York, year in and year out, because they like the place. I told him I couldn't think of another town so highly recommended, not even excepting Houston.

Well, we settled that and some other problems, and finally he came right down to cases and showed his hand. He didn't know whether he could make good or not. He felt pretty certain that he couldn't. It was as different from the old George of boyhood days as George was different from from the town he came out of. I asked George if he was real sure he didn't have malaria, and he told me he had been examined several times and was sure. After that I about half gave up and just stalled around. I didn't press him any more that afternoon. But we made an engagement for a moving-picture spree that night. He seemed to enjoy the pictures, laughed at them often, and that's a hopeful sign. You take a fellow that can still laugh, and he's as good as ever if you can get to the spot with the cure.

After the pictures we wandered around and talked about old times. I tried to draw George out on what he intended to

do. He didn't seem to have any definite notions. Still, he seemed to be married to the State of Texas and did a lot of talking about "the ties of a lifetime," and I asked him what old ties he was talking about. His mother and father were both dead, and he didn't have any brother or sister. His father fell into a cotton-gin and thus defrauded a neighbor or two of their just rights and privileges of taking a shot at him in return for some he had taken in their direction. I tried to find out just what there was about the State of Texas that still held a claim on him. He had gone with a few of the girls in the old home town, but he seemed to be immune after he left.

FINALLY we went into a restaurant for a bite to eat before going to bed. We sat there until about one o'clock in the morning, and then started home. In the light in front of the restaurant,—the town was dark then,—we met a hard-looking citizen. He was on his way into the restaurant. He was fairly well dressed, but very much *à la* Hick. Do you get me? He had on good clothes, but they hadn't helped much. At first glance he reminded me of some of my own early efforts just after reaching New York. I probably would not have noticed him at all, except that George stepped right in front of the stranger. The stranger looked up and registered recognition and astonishment. It wasn't a handshake, though; you could tell instantly that George and this person didn't greatly esteem and respect each other.

I stalled around waiting for one or the other to decide to get out of the way. But neither one moved. They just stared poison at each other. I took a good look at this stranger, and it seemed to me that I ought to remember him. I was running over some names in my mind when George reached out and landed a smash on his jaw that rocked him. He came back with his head ducked low. Right then I knew he was from the old home town, because that was familiar strategy. George ought to have side-stepped the rush, but he didn't. He landed two good ones, and then he got this guy's ivory dome in his stomach. They went down in a heap.

Up to that time there was some chance of my being peacemaker, but that ended all hope of my butting in. I couldn't use any of this fight after they decided to ruin

their clothes with it. I hadn't brought along any extra clothes. Well, this Black Hand person went down on top of George, and then George went over on top of him. About that time a six-shooter fell out of the stranger's pocket and George picked it up. The details from here on become rather gory. I might not have enjoyed this fight except that all three of us had learned our Marquis of Queensberry rules in the same town.

George hauled off and smashed that fellow over the head with the gun, tearing away several square inches of scalp. Then he disentangled himself a little and got another good swing that broke our friend's nose. After that George tossed the six-shooter out of reach, and I kicked it into the gutter.

But this stranger was a glutton for punishment. He came right back in spite of the fact that a stream of blood was pouring out of his scalp. He caught some new holds and drew George down close to him. George obligingly rested his cheek on the cheek of his new friend and sank his teeth into the ear of this fellow, leaving the top half of it hanging limp. It certainly was a lovely fight. It called back happy boyhood days to me. Around the old schoolhouse there were lots of mutilated ears.

OUR friend made one last desperate effort to throw George, and then gave up. George climbed off, and taking good aim, kicked in several ribs on his left side. Then he went around on his right side and broke another one. You know a rib makes a noise when it breaks. I nearly weakened. I had been away for a long time and some of the old home-town customs were a shock to me. George walked away and spit a mouthful of blood. Then he suggested that we go to a drugstore, which we did. It seems he didn't want to get his victim to a hospital, but preferred for him to die right there on the sidewalk. While George was buying things in the drugstore, I started to use the telephone, but he came over and stopped me. I protested, but he insisted that the police would eventually find this remnant of humanity with the limp ear.

I might mention that this was the quietest fight ever heard of. Neither party had said a word, and no crowd gathered. The opening round took place in the light, but the details were enacted in the dark just to one side. Everything was dark for several blocks along there, except that one restaurant.

After George had repaired his own damages, we drifted on toward my hotel. Finally I said: "Well, George, tell us about it. Was this just a little sport, or did you and this guy know each other?"

George was astonished.

"Didn't you recognize him?" he asked.

"He looked like something I had seen in the cartoons," I said.

To make a long story short, this was the wool-hat that bawled George out that day in the store back in the old home town. This was the first time he had seen him since.

Next morning, before I got up, George came in to see me. You never saw such a change in a man in all your life. He was wearing his best clothes, and George always knew how to wear clothes. He was not stoop-shouldered any more. And he had two little red spots of color right on each cheek-bone. He said good morning and then came over and hit me with a pillow and laughed. He told me he had resigned and said he was ready to go to New York. We left that afternoon.

Now, that's what I call a pure case of atavism. All George's intelligence tells him that rows and fights and feuds are wrong. He's got more brains than a whole penful of ordinary, intelligent folks. But when it's all said and done, he came out of a place where you don't permit certain remarks to be made, and he hadn't got over the fact that he didn't offer any fight that day.

There are a lot of folks here in the office who think George is going to sprout wings some day and float off to where he belongs. There must be two hundred people I know who think something like that about George. Personally, before I'd insult that guy, I'd go out and disguise myself as Demon Rum and start a scratching match with the whole W. C. T. U. He's got atavism.

"SENATOR LOGWOOD TAKES THE CASE," the first of a remarkably attractive group of stories Mr. Crowell has written about a unique Texas character, will appear in the next, the August, issue of **THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE**.

Oh, You Tex!



A Three-Part Novel by William Macleod Raine

(Events of the Opening Chapters)

JACK Roberts, line-rider for a cattle outfit, the "A T O," had run into a streak of rapid action: he had all but caught Pete Dinsmore, one of a cattle-rustling band—and had all but gotten himself shot in the bargain; he had gotten into a fist-fight with a young fellow whom he had worsted—and afterward discovered him to be Ford Wadley, son of his employer Clint Wadley. He had promptly set out to find another job—and on the way to an extent regained favor with the Wadley family by rescuing Clint's daughter Ramona from a herd of stampeded cattle. And then, just to be sure there'd be no let-up in this action business, he joined the Rangers who were just beginning to bring law into the Panhandle.

Other happenings followed thick and fast in west Texas: Ridley, a young Easterner, was intrusted by Wadley with the delivery of six thousand dollars in gold. He was waylaid by the rustlers, and the money stolen. . . . Ford Wadley went to a Mexican dance and aroused the jealousy of a man named Alviro—who attacked Wadley, only to be knocked down.

THE second third of this exciting novel by the author of "The Yukon Trail" and "A Man Four-Square" contains some of its best episodes. You can easily start it now if you missed the first installment.

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Wadley rode away and met the Dinsmore gang, with whom he had been friendly. He demanded of them a share in the proceeds of the theft of his father's money. They refused; he threatened exposure—and thus passed a death-sentence upon himself. They agreed to a division of the money and then rode away separately.

Next day a Mexican reported to Ranger Roberts that a dead man was lying near the "cap-rock." Roberts found there Ford Wadley, a bullet-hole through his head.

Roberts pursued Alviro to a remote locality and, single-handed, took him from his friends and arrested him for the murder of Wadley—though he was not wholly convinced of his guilt. And later, in town, when the Dinsmore gang and their sympathizers attempted to lynch Alviro, Roberts stood them off.

"There's only one mob, isn't there?" Roberts calmly made inquiry when some one attempted to dissuade him from fighting such odds. And with a package which he pretended contained dynamite, he succeeded in bluffing the lynchers off and in rescuing the prisoner in his charge.

CHAPTER XVI

WADLEY GOES HOME IN A BUCKBOARD

CLINT WADLEY took his daughter to the end of the street where his sister lived, blowing her up like a Dutch uncle every foot of the way. The thing she had done had violated his sense of the proprieties, and he did not hesitate to tell her so. He was the more unrestrained in his scolding because for a few moments his heart had stood still at the danger in which she had placed herself.

"If you was just a little younger, I'd sure enough paddle you. Haven't you been brought up a-tall? Did you grow up like *Topsy*, without any folks? Don't you-all know better than to mix up in men's affairs and git yoreself talked about?" he spluttered.

Ramona hung her head and accepted his reproaches humbly. It was easy for her to believe that she had been immodest and forward in her solicitude. Probably Mr. Roberts—and everybody else, for that matter—thought she could not be a nice girl, since she had been so silly.

"You go home and stay there," continued Clint severely. "Don't you-all poke yore head outside the door till I come back. I'll not have you traipsing around this-a-way. Hear me, honey?"

"Yes, Dad," she murmured through the tears that were beginning to come.

"I reckon, when it comes to standing off a crowd of hoodlums, I don't need any help from a half-grown little squab like you. I been too easy on you. That's what ails you."

Ramona had not a word to say for herself. She crept into the house and up to her room, flung herself on the bed and burst into a passion of weeping. Why had she made such an exhibition of herself? She was ashamed in every fiber of her being. Not only had she disgraced herself, but also her father and her aunt.

MEANWHILE her father was on his way back downtown. In spite of his years, the cattleman was hot-headed. He had something to say to Pete Dinsmore. If it led to trouble, Wadley would be more than content, for he believed now that the Dinsmore gang—or some one of them acting in behalf of all—had murdered his son, and he would not rest easy until he had avenged the boy.

The Dinsmores were not at the Last Chance nor at the Bird-cage. A lounge at the bar of the latter told the owner of the A T O that they had gone to the corral for their horses. He had heard them say they were going to leave town.

The cattleman followed them to the corral they frequented. Pete Dinsmore was saddling his horse in front of the stable. The others were not in sight, but a stable-boy in ragged jeans was working over some harness near the door.

Dinsmore sulkily watched Wadley approach. He was in a sour and sullen rage. One of the privileges of a "bad man" is to see others step softly and speak humbly in his presence. But to-day a young fellow scarcely out of his teens had made him look like a fool. Until he had killed Roberts, the chief of the outlaws would never be satisfied, nor would his prestige be what it had been. It had been the interference of Wadley and his crowd that had saved the ranger from him, and he was ready to vent his anger on the cattleman if he found a good chance.

The outlaw knew well enough that he could not afford to quarrel with the owner of the A T O. There was nothing to gain by it and everything to lose, for even if the cattleman should be killed in a fair fight, the rangers would eventually either shoot the Dinsmores or run them out of the country. But Pete was beyond reason just now. He was like a man with a toothache who grinds on his sore molar in the intensity of his pain.

"I've come to tell you something, Dinsmore," said Wadley harshly.

"Come to apologize for throwing me down, I reckon. You needn't. I'm through with you."

"I'm not through with you. What I want to say is that you're a dog. No, you're worse than any hound I ever knew; you're a yellow wolf."

"What's that?" cried the bad-man, astounded. His uninjured hand crept to a revolver-butt.

"I believe in my soul that you murdered my boy."

"You're crazy, man—crazy with the heat. The Mexican—"

"Is a witness against you. When you heard that he had followed Ford that night, you got to worrying. You didn't know how much he had seen. So you decided to play safe and lynch him, you hellhound."

"Where did you dream that stuff, Wadley?" demanded Dinsmore, eyes narrowed to wary shining slits.

"I didn't dream it, any more than I dreamed that you followed Ford from the cap-rock where you hole up, and shot him from behind at Battle Butte."

"That's fighting talk, Wadley. I've just got one word to say to it. You're a liar. Come a-shootin', soon as you're ready."

"That's now."

THE cattleman reached for his forty-five, but before he could draw, a shot rang out from the corral. Wadley staggered forward a step or two and collapsed.

Pete did not relax his wariness. He knew that one of the gang had shot Wadley, but he did not yet know how badly the man was hurt. From his place behind the horse he took a couple of left-handed shots across the saddle at the helpless man. The cattleman raised himself on an elbow but fell back with a grunt.

The position of Dinsmore was an awkward one to fire from. Without lifting his gaze from the victim, he edged slowly round the bronco.

There was a shout of terror, a sudden rush of hurried feet. The stableboy had flung himself down on Wadley in such a way as to protect the prostrate body with his own.

"Git away from there," ordered the outlaw, his face distorted with the lust for blood that comes to the man-killer.

"No. You've done enough harm. Let him alone," cried the stableboy wildly.

The young fellow was gaunt and ragged. A thin beard straggled over the boyish face; the lips were bloodless, and the eyes filled with fear. But he made no move to scramble for safety. It was plain that in spite of his paralyzing horror he meant to stick where he was.

Dinsmore's lip curled cruelly. He hesitated. This boy was the only witness against him. Why not make a clean job of it and wipe him out too? He fired—and missed; Pete was not an expert left-hand shot.

"Look out, Pete. Men coming down the road," called the other Dinsmore from the gate of the corral.

Pete looked and saw two riders approaching. It was too late now to make sure of Wadley or to silence the wrangler. He shoved his revolver back into its place and swung to the saddle.

"Was it you shot Wadley?" he asked his brother.

"Yep, and none too soon. He was reaching for his gun."

"The fool would have it. Come, let's burn the wind out of here before a crowd gathers."

Gurley and a fourth man joined them. The four galloped down the road, and disappeared in a cloud of white dust.

A MOMENT later Jumbo Wilkins descended heavily from his horse. Quint Sullivan, another rider for the A T O, was with him.

The big line-rider knelt beside his employer and examined the wound. "Hit once—in the side," he pronounced.

"Will—will he live?" asked the white-faced stableboy.

"Don't know. But he's a tough nut, Clint is. He's liable to be cussin' out the boys again in a month or two."

Wadley opened his eyes. "You're damn whistling, Jumbo. Get me to my sister's."

Quint, a black-haired youth of twenty, gave a repressed whoop. "One li'l bit of a lead pill can't faze the boss. They took four or five cracks at him, and didn't hit but once. That's plumb lucky."

"It would 'a' been luckier if they hadn't hit him at all, Quint," answered Jumbo dryly. "You fork yore hawss, son, and go git Doc Bridgman. And you,—whatever they call you, Mr. Hawss-rustler,—harness a team to that buckboard."

Jumbo, with the expertness of an old-timer who had faced emergencies of this kind before, bound up the wound temporarily. The stable-rustler hitched a team, covered the bottom of the buckboard with hay and helped Wilkins lift the wounded man to it.

Clint grinned faintly at the white-faced boy beside him. A flicker of recognition lighted his eyes. "You look like you'd seen a ghost, Ridley. Close call for both of us, eh? Lucky that ranger plugged Dinsmore in the shooting-arm. Pete's no two-gun man. Can't shoot for sour apples with his left hand. Kicked up dust all around us, and didn't score once."

"Quit yore talkin', Clint," ordered Jumbo.

"All right, Doc." The cattleman turned to Ridley. "Run ahead, boy, and prepare Mona so's she wont be scared plumb to death. Tell her it's only a triflin' flesh-wound. Keep her busy fixing up a bed

for me—and bandages. Don't let her worry. See?"

RIDLEY had come to town only two days before. Ever since the robbery he had kept a lone camp on Turkey Creek. There was plenty of game for the shooting, and in that vast emptiness of space he could nurse his wounded self-respect. But he had run out of flour and salt. Because Tascosa was farther from the A T O ranch than Clarendon, he had chosen it as a point to buy supplies. The owner of the corral had offered him a job, and he had taken it. He had not supposed that Ramona was within a hundred miles of the spot. The last thing in the world he wanted was to meet her, but there was no help for it now.

Her aunt carried to Ramona the word that a man was waiting outside with a message from her father. When she came down the porch steps, there were still traces of tear-stains on her cheeks. In the gathering dusk she did not at first recognize the man at the gate. She moved forward doubtfully, a slip of a slender-limbed girl, full of the unstudied charm and grace of youth.

Halfway down the path she stopped, her heart beating a little faster. Could this wan and ragged man with the unkempt beard be Art Ridley, always so careful of his clothes and his personal appearance? She was a child of impulse. Her sympathy went out to him with a rush, and she streamed down the path to meet him. A strong, warm little hand pressed his. A flash of soft eyes irradiated him. On her lips was the tender smile that told him she was still his friend.

"Where in the world have you been?" she cried. "And what have you been doing to yourself?"

His blood glowed at the sweetness of her generosity.

"I've been—camping."

With the shyness and the boldness of a child, she pushed home her friendliness. "Why don't you ever come to see a fellow any more?"

He did not answer that, but plunged at his mission. "Miss Ramona, I've got bad news for you. Your father has been hurt—not very badly, I think. He told me to tell you that the wound was only a slight one."

Mona went white to the lips. "How?" she whispered.

"The Dinsmores shot him. The men are bringing him here."

He caught her in his arms as she reeled. For a moment her little head lay against his shoulder, and her heart beat against his.

"A trifling flesh-wound, your father called it," went on Ridley. "He said you were to get a bed ready for him, and fix bandages."

She steadied herself and beat back the wave of weakness that had swept over her.

"Yes," she said. "I'll tell Aunt. Have they sent for the doctor?"

"Quint Sullivan went."

A wagon creaked. Mona flew into the house to tell her aunt, and out again to meet her father. Her little ankles flashed down the road. Agile as a boy, she climbed into the back of the buckboard.

"Oh, Dad!" she cried in a broken little voice, and her arms went round him in a passion of love.

He was hurt worse than he was willing to admit to her.

"It's all right, honey-bug. Doc Bridgman will fix me up fine. Yore old dad is a mighty live sinner yet."

Ridley helped Jumbo carry the cattle-man into the house. As he came out, the Doctor passed him going in.

Ridley slipped away in the gathering darkness and disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII

OLD-TIMERS

AS soon as Captain Ellison heard of what had happened at Tascosa, he went over on the stage from Mobettie to look at the situation himself. He dropped in at once to see his old friends the Wadleys. Ramona opened the door to him.

"Uncle Jim!" she cried, and promptly disappeared in his arms for a hug and a kiss.

The ranger captain held her off and examined the lovely flushed face.

"Dog it, you get prettier every day you live. I wisht I was thirty years younger. I'd make some of these lads get a move on them."

"I wish you were," she laughed. "They need some competition to make them look at me. None of them would have a chance then—even if they wanted it."

"I believe that. I got to believe it to

keep my self-respect. It's all the consolation we old-timers have. How's Clint?"

"Better. You should hear him swear under his breath because the Doctor wont let him smoke more than two pipes a day, and because we wont let him eat whatever he wants to. He's worse than a sore bear," said Ramona proudly.

"Lead me to him."

A moment later the ranger and the cattleman were shaking hands. They had been partners in their youth, had fought side by side in the Civil War, and had shot plains Indians together at Adobe Walls a few years since. They were so close to each other that they could quarrel whenever they chose, which they frequently did.

"How, old-timer!" asked the ranger captain.

"Starved to death. They feed me nothing but slops—soup and gruel and custard and milk-toast. Fine for a full-grown man, aint it? Jim, you go out and get me a big steak and cook it on the coals of a camp-fire, and I'll give you a deed to the A T O."

"To-morrow, Clint. The Doc says—"

"*Mañana!* That's what they all say. Is this Mexico or God's country? What I want, I want now."

"You always did—and you most always got it too," said Ellison, his eyes twinkling reminiscently.

Mona shook a warning finger at her father. "Well, he wont get it now. He'll behave, too, or he'll not get his pipe to-night."

The sick man grinned. "See how she bullies a poor old man, Jim. I'm worse than that *Lear* fellow in the play—most henpecked father you ever did see."

"Will she let you talk?"

"He may talk to you, Uncle Jim."

"What did I tell you?" demanded the big cattleman from the bed with the mock bitterness that was a part of the fun they both enjoyed. "You see, I got to get her permission. I'm a slave."

"That's what a nurse is for, Clint. You want to be glad you got the sweetest one in Texas." The Captain patted Ramona affectionately on the shoulder before he passed to the business of the day. "I want to know about all these ructions in Tascosa. Tell me the whole story."

THEY told him. He listened in silence till they had finished, asked a question or two, and made one comment.

"That boy Roberts of mine is sure some go-getter."

"He'll do," conceded the cattleman. "That lucky shot of his—the one that busted Dinsmore's arm—certainly saved my life later."

"Lucky shot!" exploded Ellison. "And you just through telling me how he plugged the dollars in the air. Doggone it, I want you to know there was no darned luck about it. My boys are the best shots in Texas."

"I'll take any one of 'em on soon as I'm out—any time, any place, any mark," retorted Wadley promptly.

"I'll go you. Roberts is a new man and hasn't had much experience. I'll match him with you."

"New man! Hm! He's the best you've got, and you know it."

"I don't know whether he is, but he's good enough to make any old-timer like you look like a plugged nickel."

The cattleman snorted again, disdaining an answer.

"Dad is the best shot in Texas," pronounced Ramona calmly, rallying to her father's support. For years she had been the umpire between the two.

The Captain threw up his hands. "I give up."

"And Mr. Roberts is just about as good."

"That's settled then," said Ellison. "But what I came to say is that I'm going to round up the Dinsmore bunch. We can't convict them of murder on the evidence we have, but I'll arrest them for shooting you and try to get a confession out of one of them. Does that look reasonable, Clint?"

Wadley considered this.

"It's worth a try-out. The Dinsmores are game. They wont squeal. But I've a sneaking notion Gurley is yellow. He might come through—or that other fellow Overstreet might. You want to be careful how you try to take that outfit though, Jim. They're dangerous as rattlesnakes."

"That's the kind of outfit my boys eat up," answered the chipper little officer as he rose to leave. "Well, so long, Clint. Behave proper, and mebbe this young tyrant will give you-all a nice stick of candy for a good boy."

He went out chuckling.

The cattleman snorted. "Beats all how crazy Jim is about those ranger boys of his. He thinks the sun rises and sets by

them. I want to tell you they've got to sleep on the trail a long time and get up early in the mo'ning to catch the Dinsmores in bed. That bird Pete always has one eye open. What's more, he and his gang wear their guns low."

"I don't think Uncle Jim ought to send boys like Jack Roberts out against such desperadoes. It's not fair," Ramona said decisively.

"Oh, isn't it?" Her father promptly switched to the other side. "You give me a bunch of boys like young Roberts, and I'd undertake to clean up this whole country, and Lincoln County too. He's a dead shot. He's an A-1 trailer. He can whip his weight in wildcats. He's got savvy. He uses his brains. And he's game from the toes up. What more does a man need?"

"I didn't know you liked him," his daughter said innocently.

"Like him? No! He's too darned fresh to suit me. What's liking him got to do with it? I'm just telling you that no better officer ever stood in shoe-leather."

"Oh, I see."

Ramona said no more. She asked herself no questions as to the reason, but she knew that her father's words of praise were sweet to hear. They sent a warm glow of pride through her heart. She wanted to think well of this red-haired ranger who trod the earth as though he were the heir of all the ages. In some strange way Fate had linked his life with hers from that moment when he had literally flung himself in her path to fight a mad bull for her life.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAPPED!

THE territory which Captain Ellison had to cover to find the Dinsmore gang was as large as Maine. Over this country the buffalo-hunter had come and gone; the cattleman was coming and intended to stay. Large stretches of it were entirely uninhabited; here and there sod or adobe houses marked where hardy ranchers had located on the creeks; and in a few places small settlements dotted the vast prairies.

There were in those days three towns in the Panhandle. If you draw a line due east from Tascosa, it will pass very close to Mobeetie, a hundred miles away. Clar-

endon is farther to the south. In the seventies Amarillo was only what Jumbo Wilkins would have called "a whistling-post in the desert," a place where team-outfits camped because water was handy. The official capital of the Panhandle was Mobeetie, the seat of government of Wheeler County, to which were attached for judicial purposes more than thirty other counties not yet organized or even peopled.

To the towns of the Panhandle were drifting in cowboys, freighters, merchants, gamblers, cattle-outfits and rustlers from Colorado, New Mexico and the more settled parts of Texas. They were the hardier sons of an adventurous race, for each man had to make good his footing by his own strength. At first there had been no law except that which lay in the good will of men, and the holster by their side. The sheriff of Wheeler County had neither the deputies nor the financial backing to carry justice into the mesquite. Game gunmen served as marshals in the towns, but these had no authority on the plains. Until Captain Ellison and his little company of rangers moved into the district, there had been no way of taking law into the chaparral. The coming of these quiet men in buckskin was notice to the bad man that murder and robbery were not merely pleasant pastimes.

Ellison wanted the Dinsmores, not because he believed he could yet hang any serious crime on them, but for the moral effect upon them and the community. Clint Wadley had gone looking for trouble and had been wounded in consequence. No Texas jury would convict on that count. But it was not a conviction the fire-eating little Captain wanted just now. He intended to show that his boys could go out and arrest the Dinsmores or any other lawbreakers, whenever the occasion called for it. It might take them a week or a month or six months, but they would bag their game in the end. The rule of the Texas Rangers was to sleep on a man's trail until they found him.

THE Captain stationed a man at each of the three towns. He sent two on a scouting-trip through No Man's Land, and two more to search Palo Duro Cañon. He watched the stages as they went and came, questioned mule-skinners with freight outfits, kept an eye on *tendejóns* and feed-corral. And at the end of three weeks he

had no results whatever to show, except a sarcastic note from Pete Dinsmore complimenting him on his force of rangers.

The Captain was furious, but not a whit discouraged.

"Dog it, we'll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," he told his lieutenant Hawley.

To them came Jack Roberts with a proposition. "I've found out that Homer Dinsmore has a girl in Tascosa. She's a Mexican. I know about her through Tony Alviro. It seems she's a cousin of Bonita, the girl Tony is going to marry. About once a week Dinsmore rides into town at night, ties his horse in the brush back of her house, and goes in to see her. If you say so, Chief, I'll make it my business to be there when he comes."

"Need any help, do you reckon?"

"No. I'll have to hide out in the mesquite. One man will be better on that job than two."

"All right, son. You know yore job. Get him."

That was all the warrant Jack wanted or needed. He returned to Tascosa and made his preparations.

Every night after dark he slipped out of town by the north road till he was on the open prairie, then swung round in a semicircle skirting the lights of the settlement. He had arranged a blind in the brush from which he could see the back of the Menendez "soddy." Occasionally he comforted himself with a cautiously smoked cigarette, but mostly he lay patiently watching the trap that was to lure his prey. At one o'clock each morning he rose, returned on his beat, went to bed and fell instantly asleep.

On the fifth night there was a variation of the program.

It was between nine and ten o'clock that Jack heard the hoot of an owl. He sat up instantly, eyes and ears keyed for action.

The back door of the sod house opened, and through the night stillness floated the faint strumming of a guitar. Jack did not doubt that it was the answering signal to show that all was safe.

A man crept forward from the mesquite and disappeared inside the house.

Through the brush the ranger snaked his way to the point from which the hooting of the owl had come. A bronco was tethered to a bush. An examination showed that the horse had been ridden far but not too fast.

Jack was satisfied the man had come alone.

A FAINT trail wound in and out among the mesquite and the cactus to the house. Beside this trail, behind a clump of prickly pear, the ranger sat down and waited. The hour-hand of his watch crept to ten, to eleven, to twelve. Roberts rose occasionally, stretched himself to avoid any chance of cramped muscles, and counted stars by way of entertainment. He had spent more diverting evenings, but there was a good chance that the fag end of this one would be lively enough to compensate.

Shortly after midnight a shaft of light reached out from the house into the desert. The back door had opened. A woman came out, took a few steps forward, peered about her, and called that all was clear. A man followed. The two stood talking for a minute in low tones; then the man kissed her and turned briskly toward the brush. According to the ranger's program the girl should have returned to the house, but instead she waited in the moonlight to see the last of her lover. When he waved an arm to her and cried "*Buenas noches, chachita*," she threw him a kiss across the starlit prairie.

Intent on his good night, the man missed the ill-defined trail that led to his horse and zigzagged through the brush at another angle. The ranger, light-footed as a cat, moved forward noiselessly to intercept him, crouching low and taking advantage of all the cover he could find. Luck was with him. Dinsmore strode within a yard of the kneeling man without a suspicion of danger.

A powerful forearm slid out from the brush. Sinewy fingers caught the far ankle of the moving man. One strong pull sent Dinsmore off his balance. The outlaw clutched wildly at the air and came crashing down. He fell into a bush of catclaw cactus.

The ranger was on him like a wildcat. Before his victim could make a move to defend himself, Jack had the man handcuffed with his arms behind him.

Dinsmore, his face in the catclaw, gave a smothered cry for help. From where he was, the ranger could not see the house, but he heard the excited voice of the woman, the sound of a commotion, and the beat of rapid footsteps.

An excited voice called: "*¿Quién es?*"

The trapped man wanted to explain, but his captor rubbed the face of the outlaw deeper into the torturing spines of the cactus.

"Don't ask any questions," advised Roberts. "Get back into the house *pronto*. The rangers have taken Dinsmore. Unless you're looking for trouble, you'd better vamose."

Evidently two or three Mexicans had run out to the rescue. Jack could hear them discussing the situation in whispers. He had them at a double disadvantage. They did not know how many rangers lay in the mesquite; nor did they want to fall afoul of them in any case. The men drew back slowly, still in excited talk among themselves, and disappeared inside the house. The woman protested volubly and bitterly till the closing of the door stifled her voice.

JACK pulled his prisoner to a more comfortable position. "Sorry you fell into the catclaw, Dinsmore," he said. "If you'll stand hitched, I'll draw the spine from your face."

The man cursed him savagely.

"All right," said the ranger amiably. "If you want 'em as souvenirs, I'll not object. Suits me if it does you. We'll go now."

He tied to the handcuffs the end of the lariat which was attached to the saddle. The other end he fastened to the pommel.

"I'll not go a step with you," growled Dinsmore.

"Oh, yes, you better step along. I'd hate to have to drag you through this brush. It's some rough."

The ranger swung to the saddle. The bronco answered the pressure of the rider's knee and began to move. The lariat jerked tight. Sullenly Dinsmore yielded.

But his spirit was unbroken. As he stumbled along in front of the horse, he filled the night with raucous oaths.

"Take these cuffs off'm me and come down from that horse," he stormed. "Do that, and I'll beat off yore head."

The man on horseback smiled. "You're the laziest fellow I ever did see, Dinsmore," he drawled. "The last fellow that licked me pulled me from the saddle."

"Just let me get a lick at you," pleaded the outlaw. "I'll give you that bronc' you're riding if you'll stand up to me man to man."

"Can't do it. I'm here for business and not for pleasure. Sorry."

"You've got no right to arrest me. What's the charge?"

"I've forgot whether it's brand-blotting, highway robbery, murder, or mayhem—any old crime would fit you."

"You've got no evidence."

"Mebbe so, mebbe not," answered the ranger lightly. "Cap Ellison said he'd like to have a squint at you, anyhow, so I said I'd fetch you along. No trouble a-tall to show goods."

The outlaw bared his tobacco-stained teeth in a sudden fury of rage. "Some day I'll gun you right for this."

The narrow-loined youth with the well-packed shoulders looked down at him, and the eyes of the officer were hard and steady as steel.

"Dinsmore," he said, "we're going to put you and yore outfit out of business in the Panhandle. Your day is done. You've run on the rope long enough. I'll live to see you hanged—and soon."

CHAPTER XIX

KIOWAS ON THE WARPAT

JACK ROBERTS did not leave town inconspicuously with his prisoner in the middle of the night. He made instead a public exit, for Captain Ellison wanted to show the Panhandle that the law could reach out and get the Dinsmores just as it could any other criminals. With his handcuffed captive on a horse beside him, the ranger rode down to the post office just before the stage left. Already the word had spread that one of the Dinsmores had been taken by an officer. Now the town gathered to see the notorious "bad man" and his tamer.

Dinsmore faced the curious crowd with a defiant sneer, but he was burning with rage and humiliation. He and his crowd had carried things with a high hand. They were not only outlaws; they were "bad men" in the frontier sense of the word. They had shot down turbulent citizens who disputed their sway. Pete and Homer especially had won reputations as killers, and game men sidestepped them rather than deny their claims. Yet twice within a month this smooth-faced boy had crossed their path and bested them. The pride of Homer Dinsmore was galled to the quick. He would have given all he had to "get a

lick at" the ranger now before all these people.

Tascosa watched the young officer and his captive from a distance. The townsfolk offered no audible comment on the situation, either by way of approval or disapproval. The fear of the outlaws had been too long over them. This was not the end of the matter. It was still a good betting proposition that some one of the gang would "get" this jaunty youth before he was much older. But it is certain that the arrest he had made single-handed had its effect. It is inevitable that a frontier camp shall some day discard its wild youth and put on the sobriety of a settled community. Was this time at hand for the Panhandle?

A rider galloped out of town after the horsemen. The ranger turned to face him and made sure that the rifle beneath his leg would slip easily from its scabbard. An attempt at a rescue was always a possibility on the cards.

The man drew his cow-pony up beside them.

"Evening, Mr. Man-in-a-Hurry. Looking for anybody in particular?" asked the red-haired ranger, his chill eyes fixed on the stranger.

"For you. I want to help guard your prisoner to Mobeetie."

"Much obliged," answered Roberts dryly. "Am I needing help?"

"You may. You've got to sleep. Let me ride with you."

The brain of Jack Roberts began to register a memory. This young fellow was in ragged jeans and a butternut shirt. His hair was long and unkempt. He looked haggard and ill-fed. But he was the same youth the ranger had glimpsed for a moment in the bravery of fine clothes and gay address on the day of the bulldogging. Jack remembered his promise to Ramona Wadley.

"Fine! Come along. We'll take watch and watch through the night," he told the boy.

Homer Dinsmore's teeth drew back in a derisive snarl. "Want company again on the trip so's you won't be robbed, Mr. Ridley?"

The Easterner did not answer, but color flushed his face at the taunt. Roberts offered a comment on his behalf:

"Ridley was young then. He's getting older every day. I notice he didn't ask for company when he flung himself down

over Clint Wadley's body to protect it from the bullets of a gunman."

ALL afternoon they followed the Canadian River as it wound to the east. They made camp beside it at night, cooking the coffee on a fire of buffalo chips. Jerked beef and hardtack, washed down with coffee, was their fare.

Dinsmore had fallen into a sullen silence, but the other two carried on desultory talk. The two young fellows were not very comfortable in each other's society; they did not understand the mental habits of each other. But Jack maintained a cheerful friendliness to which Arthur responded gratefully. Behind the curtain of their talk was a girl. The spell of her was on them both. Each of them could see her in the coals of the fire, light-footed and slim, with shy eyes tender and shining. But neither of them drew the curtain to their deeper thoughts.

After they had eaten, the ranger handcuffed his prisoner and pegged him down loosely. He put out the fire, for he did not want the location of the camp to be betrayed by smoke. He gave Ridley the first watch—because it was the easier of the two. With a saddle for a pillow and a slicker for a blanket, he lay down beneath the stars and fell asleep. Once, in his dreams, he thought he heard the sound of beating drums. When he awakened at the time set, the night was still. The prisoner was sound asleep, and Ridley, propped against the trunk of a cottonwood, was keeping vigilant watch.

He mentioned his fancy about the drums. Arthur smiled. "Before Dinsmore turned over, he was snoring like a far-away thunder-storm. I expect that's what you heard."

Jack roused the others as soon as the promise of day was in the sky. By sunup they were ready to travel.

There was a bluff back of the camp that gave an outlook over the country. The ranger left his prisoner in the care of Arthur while he climbed to its summit for a glance up and down the river. He knew that the Mexican girl would get word to the friends of her sweetheart that he had been arrested. There was a chance that they might already be close. Anyhow, it would do no harm to see—and if he had not taken that precaution, undoubtedly all three of the party would have been dead inside of half an hour.

FOR the first sweeping glance of the ranger showed him a tragedy: the valley was filled with Indians. Apparently as yet they did not know that any white men were in the neighborhood, for the smoke was beginning to rise from morning fires. In a little pocket, just off from the camp, their ponies were herded. At the opposite side were a dozen ox-wagons grouped together in a circle to form a corral. The tongue of the nearest wagon was propped up by a yoke, and across it was the naked body of a man who had been crucified and tortured. The other drivers of the freight-outfit were nowhere in sight. Either they were lying dead behind the wagons, or they had escaped on horseback.

The ranger drew back at once from the bluff. He knew that probably he had been seen by the Indian lookouts; if he and his party were going to get away, it must be done quickly. He ran down the hill to his companions.

"Indians—Kiowas—hundreds of them," he explained. "They've captured a freight-outfit and killed the drivers. We'll cross the river below their camp if we can." As he spoke, he was busy unlocking the handcuffs of the prisoner. To Dinsmore he gave a revolver.

It seemed to Ridley that his heart was pumping water. Death with torture was the punishment given captives by the plains Indians. He knew he must be ghastly white, but he said nothing.

The three men rode out of the ravine to the river. Already they could hear the yelling of the Kiowas a few hundred yards above. A moment later they caught sight of the savages pouring down the bank. Those in front were on foot. Others farther back, on the round-bellied Indian ponies, were galloping to catch up.

Half a mile farther down, there was a break in the river-bank which offered a better chance for crossing. The stream there broadened, cut in two by a little island. The three riders gained on their pursuers. Bullets whistled past them, but they did not stop to exchange shots. When they reached the place Jack had chosen to cross, they were four or five hundred yards ahead of the leading Indians.

They splashed into the water. Here it was shallow, but along the edge of the island the current was running swift. The Kiowas, following the fugitives down the bank, kept up a scattering fire. The bul-

lets struck the water on all sides of the three moving targets. Arthur was on the right, closest to the Indians. A little ahead of him was Dinsmore. Farther over, the ranger's horse was already breasting the deep water.

Roberts heard young Ridley cry: "He's hit!"

The ranger turned his head. His prisoner was sagging in the saddle. Arthur was riding beside the wounded man and trying to support him.

Jack drew up his horse, holding it strongly against the current, until the others were abreast of him.

"We've got to swim for it," he called across to Ridley. "I'll get him if he slips out of the saddle before we reach shore."

The horses swam side by side. Roberts encouraged Dinsmore, riding knee to knee with him. "Just a little way now. Stick it out. . . . We're right close to the bank. . . . Grab the horn tight."

AS Dinsmore slid into the water Jack caught him by the hair of the head. The swift water, racing fast round the shoulder of the island, tugged mightily at him. But the body of the ranger's horse was a barrier to keep the unconscious man from being swept downstream, and the fingers of the rider clung to the thick black hair like steel clamps.

They reached shallow water. The ranger swung from the saddle and carried Dinsmore up through the thicket that edged the bank. The horses clambered up without guidance, and Ridley drove them into the cottonwood grove, where they would be better protected from the shots of the Indians.

The ranger chose the best cover available near the head of the island and put the wounded man down gently on the ground. Already the Kiowas were halfway across the river. Jack counted twenty of them on horseback in the water.

"Can you shoot?" he asked his companion.

Ridley was behind a cottonwood around the trunk of which bushes grew thick. "B-better than I could." He was shaking with excitement.

"You can't miss 'em. We've got 'em right this time."

Jack fired. An Indian plunged head-first into the water like a rock. A moment later his body could be seen swirling in the swift current. His second shot shook

the death scream from the throat of another brave.

Twice Arthur missed.

"You've got buck-fever. Try for the horses," suggested the Texan. A moment later he gave a little whoop of encouragement. The naked shining body of a Kiowa had collapsed on the bare back of a pony. Ridley at last had scored.

Instantly the nervousness of the Easterner disappeared. His shooting had not the deadly accuracy of Roberts', but he was a good marksman, and at this close-range work his seventy-three did clean work.

The Texan did not miss a shot. He picked the leaders and took his time. A third, a fourth and a fifth brave went sliding from the backs of the swimming ponies.

The Kiowas broke under the deadly fire. Those not yet in the deep water turned and made for the shore from which they had come. The others gave with the current and drifted past the island, their bodies hanging from the far side of the ponies.

The whites on the island shot at the horses. More than one redskin, unable to get out of the current after his pony had been shot, floated down the river for miles before the body was found by his tribe.

"We got either nine or ten," said the ranger. "They'll never try another attack from that bank. Probably they'll surround the island to starve us."

He put down his rifle and opened the shirt of the wounded man. Dinsmore had been shot in the back, above the heart. Jack washed out the wound and bound it up as best he could. The outlaw might live, or he might not—assuming that the party would escape from the savages.

JACK knew that this was an assumption not likely to be fulfilled. His guess was that there were four or five hundred of the Kiowas. They would immediately post a line of guards on both sides of the river. There was a chance that a man on a fast horse might make a get-away if he left at once. He proposed to Ridley that he try this.

"Will you go too?" asked Arthur.

The ranger shook his head. "Got to stay with my prisoner."

"I'll stay too."

"If you were to make it, you could send me help."

"Think I could get away?"

The Westerner pointed to two Indians who were swimming the river below out of rifle-shot. "I doubt it. You might fight yore way through, but they'd likely get you."

"I'll stick it out here, then."

In his heart Arthur knew that he was not staying to face the danger with the Texan. When once he had got over his panic, he had fought coolly enough under the eye of his companion, but he lacked the stark courage to face the chances of that long ride alone for help.

"I reckon it's too late, anyhow," agreed Roberts. He shrugged his shoulders. "It's a toss-up, either way. But we'll sure send a few to their happy hunting-grounds before we take our long journey."

"You think—" Arthur let his fear-filled eyes finish the question.

The ranger smiled wryly. "Yore guess is as good as mine.—I'll say this: I've been in tight holes before and came through O. K. I'll back my luck to stand up this time too."

Arthur looked into the brown face of this spare, clear-eyed youth and felt that he would give his hopes of heaven for such gameness. They had not one chance in ten thousand to escape, but the sheer nerve of the boy held him as cool and easy as though he were sauntering down the main street at Clarendon.

CHAPTER XX

TEX TAKES A LONG WALK

EXCEPT for desultory firing, the Kiowas left the islanders alone for the rest of the day. The fever of the wounded man mounted. Most of the time he was out of his head, and in tossing to and fro was continually disturbing the cold-water bandages applied by the Texan.

As soon as night had fallen, Roberts put a proposition to his companion. "One of us has got to go for help. Take yore choice, Ridley. Will you go or stay?"

The Easterner felt as though his heart had been drenched in ice-water. "Can't we wait until some one comes?" he asked timidly.

"Who's likely to come? You got any friends on the way? I haven't. There's another thing: the stage will be along tomorrow. We've got to get warning to it that the Kiowas are on the warpath. If

we don't—well, you know what happened to the freight-outfit."

"If one of us goes, how can he get away?"

"I've thought of that. It will be dark for an hour before the moon gets up. The one that goes will have to drop off the bank and swim down with the current for a quarter of a mile or so, then get to the shore, crawl across the prairie till he's clear of the sentries, and make a bee-line for Tascosa."

"I couldn't find my way in the dark," faltered Arthur.

"I'd thought of that. I doubt if you could. I'm elected, then."

"Why—why can't we both go?"

"We couldn't take Dinsmore fifty yards. He's too sick a man."

"He's going to die anyhow. If I stay, we'll both die—horribly. It's every man for himself now."

Jack shook his head. "If you feel that way, you go and I'll stay."

"I—I can't go alone." He pushed his plea one step farther. "He's a criminal—a murderer. He'd kill you if he could, and he's already betrayed me. There's no call for us to wait for certain death on his account."

"None for you, but he's in my hands. I'll see it out. Maybe you can get through the lines. Crawl through the grass. Keep yore nerve and lie low if you hear 'em coming. Once you're through, you'll be all right."

"I tell you I can't go alone. If it has to be that one goes and one stays, then I'll stay."

"That's how it has to be. It's about an even break, I reckon. They're liable to get me if I go. They're liable to get you if you stay. Then again, they're liable to get neither of us if I can get through."

"What if they rush me?"

"Don't lose yore head. You can stand 'em off. They'll never make as strong an attack as they did this morning. If they make any real rush, it will likely be just before daybreak. Indians don't do business at night."

Jack made his preparations swiftly. He took off his boots and tied them to his belt. His hat he left behind.

"How will I know whether you get through the sentries?" asked Ridley.

"If you hear any shooting, you'll know I didn't. But I'm sure figuring on getting

through. Don't you forget for a minute that every hour brings help nearer. So long, old man. Best of luck!"

THE ranger grinned cheerfully at the other boy as he crept into the brush at the edge of the water. Presently Arthur heard a faint *plop* and knew that the Texan had begun his journey.

The swift current carried the swimmer downstream rapidly. He used his arms just enough to keep himself up, and let the power of the water do the rest. As a small boy he had lived in the Brazos. He knew the tricks of the expert, so that he was able now to swim with only his nose showing. For it was certain that the Indians had set watchers on the river to guard against an escape.

The island vanished behind him. Now and then he caught from one bank or the other the glow of camp-fires. Once he was sure he heard the beating of a tom-tom.

And once he gave himself up for lost. The rapid current had swept him close to the right bank. Across his vision flashed a picture of a brave armed with bow and arrow standing above him on the shore. He dived instantly. When he came up for air, only a bit of his red topknot showed. The swimmer heard the twang of an arrow and dived a second time. He was in the deep shadows of overhanging brush when he shook the water out of his eyes next time. For a dozen seconds he drew his breath in fear. But there came no shout of warning to other watchers, no shot or outcry to shatter the stillness. He guessed that the Kiowa had taken him for a log drifting downstream and had aimed wantonly to test his accuracy.

Several hundred yards below the island Jack caught at a bush projecting into the water. He swung close to the bank and very cautiously drew himself out of the river.

He listened. Except for the sound of the rushing water the night was still. Very carefully he wormed his way forward into the prairie. His progress was slow, for he had to make sure of each foot of his advance. Under cover of a mesquite-bush he put on his water-soaked boots. He crept fifty yards—one hundred. To his right a camp-fire was burning. It seemed to him once or twice that he heard voices.

An old trail worn nearly a foot deep by buffaloes served his need. In this trench he was partly hidden and could make bet-

ter progress. He traveled on all fours, still alert in every sense for danger.

Suddenly he sank full length into the trench. On the other side of a cactus-bush two Indians were squatting. They sat and talked.

The heart of the ranger sank. At any moment they might discover his presence, or they might sit there the whole night and hold him prisoner in his ditch.

For an hour he lay there, wondering each moment whether the ticking of his watch might not betray him. Then, in a leisurely way, the sentries got up and sauntered toward the river. The moon was up now, and he could see their naked bodies shining in the light.

The two Kiowas stopped a moment on the bank and talked before they separated. One moved up the river; the other turned and came back directly toward Roberts. The ranger lay in the buffalo-trail hoping that in the darkness he might escape observation. He was helpless. Even if he had brought a gun with him, he dared not shoot, for if the alarm were given, he would be driven out of cover in a few minutes.

The brave came forward to the very edge of the wallow. His moccasin touched the body of the prostrate man. Some slight shift of his attitude precipitated the crisis. He turned to listen to some sound, and his foot pressed upon the leg of the ranger.

There was an instant volcanic upheaval. The Indian, startled, leaped back. Jack was upon him like a wildcat. They struggled, their bodies so close that the Kiowa could not use his rifle. The Texan had a double advantage, that of surprise and of a more muscular body. Moreover the redskin made the mistake of trying to cling to his gun. He was flung down to the ground hard, the white man on top of him.

Jack became aware that the Indian was going to shout, and knew that if he did, all was lost. His strong brown fingers closed on the throat of the brave. There was a wild thrashing of limbs in a struggle to escape. The grip tightened, cut off a gurgling of escaping air. The naked arms and legs jerked feebly.

WHEN Roberts crept away into the darkness, he carried with him the knife of the Kiowa. The rifle would only have hampered him, since he had to travel fast and light.

With every yard gained now he was nearer safety. He knew he was leaving

the camp behind. Presently he rose to his feet and traveled faster. For the safety of the two on the island depended upon the speed with which he covered the distance between him and Tascosa.

The plainsman seldom walks. When he wants to reach a place, he rides on horseback. Jack had not walked five miles at a time within a dozen years. Now his long legs reached for the ground in a steady stride that ate up the leagues. He guided his course by the stars until he struck the river far above the camp. Once he stopped for a drink, but the thought of Ridley on the island drove his tired limbs on. Heel and toe, heel and toe, the steady march continued, till the ranger, lithe and strong though the wind and sun and outdoor life had made him, was ready to drop with fatigue.

But it was not in him to quit. He set his teeth in his exhaustion and plowed on up the trail. At last he saw the far, faint lights of Tascosa. The last mile or two were interminable, but he walked into the Bird-cage just as the clock on the wall was striking three.

The music had started for a dance. A girl in a spangled dress ran up to him.

"Come on. Let's dance," she cried, then stopped and looked at him in surprise: "What's the matter with you?"

The ranger climbed up on the bar and beat upon it with the heel of his boot. The dancers stopped in their tracks as the music died.

"The Kiowas are on the warpath. They've got two white men trapped on the big island below the bend. Gather all the horses, guns, and men you can. We start in twenty minutes."

Cowboys left their partners standing in the middle of the floor. The musicians dropped their bows and fiddles. Bartenders left unfilled the orders they had just taken. For Indians in their war-paint were a fact always very near to the frontiersman, and whatever faults the Southwest may have had in those days, its warm heart answered instantly the call for help.

The dancers scattered in all directions to get ready. A gong, beaten by the owner of the Bird-cage, rang out stridently into the quiet night to rally sleeping citizens. Children, wakened by the clamor, began to wail. Dogs barked. Excited men flung out questions and hurried away without waiting for answers.

But out of the confusion came swift

action. Each man looked to his own ammunition, weapons, horse. Women hurriedly put up lunches and packed saddlebags with supplies. In an incredibly short time a company of fifty riders had gathered in front of the Bird-cage.

With the ranger at their head, they went out of town at a fast trot. If there had been anybody there to notice it, he would have seen that the clock on the wall at the Bird-cage registered the time as twenty-seven minutes past three.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TEST

WHEN Ridley heard the faint *plop* of the ranger's body as it dropped into the water, his heart died under the fifth rib. He was alone—alone with a wounded man in his care, and five hundred fiends ravenous for his blood. For a moment the temptation was strong in him to follow Roberts into the water. Why should he stay to let these devils torture him? Dinsmore had betrayed him, to the ruination of his life. He owed the fellow nothing but ill will. And the man was a triple-notch murderer. It would be a good riddance to the country if he should be killed.

But the arguments of the young fellow did not convince him. He had showed the white feather once on impulse, without a chance to reason out the thing. But if he deserted this wounded man now, he would be a yellow coyote—and he knew it. There was something in him stronger than fear that took him back to the helpless outlaw babbling disjointed ravings.

He bathed the man's fevered body with cold water from the river, and changed the bandages on the wound. He listened, in an agony of apprehension, for the sound of a shot. None came, but this did not bring certainty that the ranger had escaped. He had left behind all his arms, and it was quite possible that they had captured him without first wounding him. Arthur reasoned with himself about his terror. Of what use was it? Why fear, since he had to face the danger anyhow? But when he thought of the morning and what it would bring forth, he was sick with the dread he could not crush.

The hours lagged endlessly. He had his watch out a thousand times trying to read its face. Occasionally he crept around the

island to make sure the Kiowas were not trying to surprise him. Hope began to grow in him as the night grew old, and this alternated with terror; for he knew that with the coming of dawn, the redskins would begin an attack.

His mind followed the ranger on his journey. By this time he must surely be halfway to Tascosa if he had escaped the Kiowas. . . . Now he might have reached the cottonwood clump beyond Big Ford. . . . Perhaps he might jump up a camp outfit with horses. If so, that would cut down the time needed to reach town.

Five o'clock by Ridley's watch! He made another circuit of his little island, and at the head of it stopped to peer into the lessening darkness. A log was drifting down the river toward the island. His attention was arrested by the way it traveled. A log in a stream follows the line of least resistance. It floats in such a way as to offer the smallest surface to the force of the current. But this log was going down at a right angle to the bank instead of parallel to it. Was it being propelled by the current alone, or by some living power behind it?

Ridley posted himself behind a cottonwood, his repeater ready for action. In another moment he would know, because if the log was adrift in the river, it would miss the point of the island and keep on its way.

Straight to the point of land the log came. There it stuck against the nose of the island. A head followed by a naked body drew itself from behind the log and climbed across it to the bank above. A second head and body appeared, a third and a fourth.

Ridley's fear was gone. He had a job to do, and he went at it in a workmanlike manner. His first shot dropped the brave on the bank. His second missed, his third went hissing up the river. But the fourth caught full in the throat one of the Kiowas on the log. The painted warrior shot head-first into the water and dropped as though he had been a stone. Before Arthur could fire again, the passengers astride the dead tree dived into the stream. Slowly the log swung around and was sucked into the current. Here and there a feathered head bobbed up. The boy fired at them from a sense of duty, but he did not flatter himself that he had scored another hit.

But the immediate danger of being

rushed was past. Ridley circled the island again to make sure that the attack at the head had not been a feint to cover one in the rear.

DURING the night Arthur had not been idle. Behind a fallen cottonwood he had scooped out a small cave in which he and the wounded man might lie protected. Now the Indians, in the full light of day, were spraying the spot with bullets. Fortunately they were notoriously poor shots, and their guns were the worst ever made. For hours the fusillade continued. Occasionally the defender answered with a shot or two to discourage any further attempt at storming his position.

The most welcome sound in Ridley's life was a scattering volley of shots that came from back of the Kiowa camp. There was a sudden rush for horses by the braves, and the scurry of pounding hoofs as they fled across the prairie. A moment later came the whoop of the cowboys in the rescue party.

Arthur, in an ecstasy of relief, ran to the edge of the water and waved his hat. Across the river came in answer the "Yip-yip, yippy-yip-yip" of the line-riders in the company. Several of them plunged into the stream and swam their horses across to the island. Among these were Jumbo Wilkins and Red Roberts.

"I see you done held the fort, son," said the fat man. "Fine and dandy! How's Dinsmore?"

"Quieter. He slept a good deal in the night. How are we going to get him across the river?"

The ranger joined them. He nodded a friendly greeting at Ridley.

"Our luck held up all right. I see you been doin' some fancy shooting."

Arthur looked at him. The eyes of the Easterner were full of timid doubt. What did this game Texan think of him who had proposed to leave a wounded man to his fate? The ranger beamed a kindly comradeship, but the other young fellow wondered what was passing in the back of his mind.

They held a committee on ways and means about Dinsmore.

"We can't stay here—got to get him to town where he can be fixed up," Jumbo said.

"We'll take him over to the other bank and send for a buckboard," decided Jack.

They found two small dead cottonwoods

and across them lashed a pair of saplings to make a raft. A saddle-blanket was stretched across this and made tight, and the wounded man was placed upon it. He was carried to the head of the island, and the improvised raft put into the water. Jumbo, Roberts and Ridley, minus their boots and outer clothes, guided the raft into the current and fought it through to the shallow water beyond.

Twenty-four hours later Dinsmore was in bed in Tascosa. Doctor Bridgman said, with the usual qualification about complications, that the man probably would get well. The bullet had not punctured his lungs.

CHAPTER XXII

TEX BORROWS A BLACKSNAKE

DINSMORE recovered from his wound and was held prisoner by Captain Ellison for a month after he was well. Then he dismissed the man with a warning.

"Skedaddle, you damn' jayhawker," was his cavalier farewell. "But listen. If ever I get the deadwood on you and yore outfit, I'll sure put you through. You know me, Dinsmore. I went through the war. For two years I took the hides off'm them.* I'm one of the lads that knocked the bark off this country. And I've got the best bunch of man-hunters you ever did see. I'm not braggin'. I'm telling you that my boys will make you look like a plugged nickel if you don't get shet of yore meanness. They're a hell-poppin' bunch of Jim-dandies, and don't you ever forget it."

Homer Dinsmore spat tobacco-juice on the floor by way of expressing his contempt. "Hell!" he sneered. "We were doing business in this neck of the woods before ever you come, and we'll be here after you've gone."

The ranger captain gave a little shrug to his shoulders. "Some folks aint got any more sense than that hog rooting under the pecan tree, Dinsmore. I've seen this country when you could swap a buffalo-bull hide for a box of cartridges or a plug of tobacco. You can't do it now, can you? I had thirty wagons full of bales of hides at old Fort Griffin in '76. In five years the buffaloes will be gone absolutely—mebbe in less time. The Indians are go-

*To "take the hides off'm them" was the expressive phraseology in which the buffalo hunter described his business.

ing with the buffaloes—and the bad men are a-going to travel the same trail. Inside of three years they'll sure be hard to find outside of jails. But you got to go yore own way. You're hard to curry, and you wear 'em low. Suits me if it does you. We'll plant you with yore boots on, one of these days."

Dinsmore swaggered from the jail and presently rode out of town to join his companions. Three days later an acquaintance stopped Jack Roberts on the street.

"Seen Cap Ellison this morning? He was down at the shipping-pen and wanted to see you. The old man's hot as a ginger-mill about something."

THE Ranger strolled down toward the cattle-yards. On the way he met Arthur Ridley. They had come to be pretty good friends in the past month. The standards of the Texan were undergoing revision. He had been brought up in an outdoor school which taught that the rock-bottom factor of a man's character is game-ness. Without it nothing else counted. This was as vital for a man as virtue for a woman. But it had begun to reach him that pluck is largely a matter of training. Arthur had lived soft, and his nerve, like his muscles, needed toughening. Were his gayety, his loyalty, his fundamental decency, the affectionate sweetness of his disposition, to count for nothing? He had a dozen advantages that Jack had not, and the cowboy admired him in spite of his defect.

"Have you spoken to Captain Ellison yet?" asked Ridley eagerly.

"Says he's thinking about it, Art. There's going to be a vacancy on the force soon. My notion is that you'll get the appointment."

It was a part of Ridley's charm for the Texan that he would not give up to his timidity. The young fellow meant to fight it out to a finish. That was one of the reasons why he wanted to join the Rangers, to be put in places that would force him to go through to a fighting finish. He had one other reason. Arthur wanted to settle a score with the Dinsmores.

Captain Ellison was listening to the complaint of a drover.

"I aim to drive a clean herd, Cap, but you know how it is yore own self. I start to drive in the spring when the hair's long and the brand's hard to read. By the time I get here, the old hair is falling out and

the brand is plain. But what's a fellow to do? I cayn't drop those off-brands by the way, can I? The inspector—"

"That's all right, Steel. The inspector knows you're on the level. Hello, Jack! I been looking for you."

The Captain drew his man to one side. "Steve Gurley's in town. He came as a spokesman for the Dinsmores and went to see Clint Wadley. The damn' scoundrel served notice on Clint that the gang had written evidence which tied Ford up with their deviltry. He said if Clint didn't call me off so's I'd let 'em alone, they would disgrace his son's memory. Of course Wadley is all broke up about it. But he's no quitter. He knows I'm going through, and he wouldn't expect me not to do the work I'm paid for."

"Do you want me to arrest Gurley?"

"Wouldn't do any good. No, just keep tabs on the coyote till he leaves town. He ought to be blacksnaked, but that's not our business, I reckon."

RIDLEY walked back with the ranger toward the main street of the town. From round a corner there came to them a strident voice.

"You stay right here, missy, till I'm through. I'm tellin' you about yore high-heeled brother. See? He was a rustler. That's what he was—a low-down thief and brand-blotter."

"Let me pass. I wont listen to you." The clear young voice was expressive of both indignation and fear.

"Not a step till I'm through telling you. Me, I'm Steve Gurley, the curly-haired terror of the Panhandle. When I talk, you listen. Un'erstand?"

The speech of the man was thick with drink. He had spent the night at the Bird-cage and was now on his way to the corral for his horse.

"You take Miss Ramona home. I'll attend to Gurley," said Roberts curtly to his friend. Into his eyes had come a cold rage Arthur had never before seen there.

At sight of them the bully's brutal insolence vanished. He tried to pass on his way, but the ranger stopped him.

"Just a moment, Gurley. You're going with me," said Jack, ominously quiet.

White and shaken, Mona bit her lip to keep from weeping. She flashed one look of gratitude at her father's former line-rider, and with a little sob of relief took Ridley's offered arm.

"You got a warrant for me?" bluffed the outlaw.

At short range there is no weapon more deadly than the human eye. Jack Roberts looked at the bully and said: "Give me yore gun."

Steve Gurley shot his slant look at the ranger, considered possibilities—and did as he was told.

"Now right about face and back-track uptown," ordered the officer.

At McGuffey's store Jack stopped his prisoner. A dozen punchers and cattlemen were hanging about. Among them was Jumbo Wilkins. He had a blacksnake whip in his hand and was teasing a pup with it. The ranger handed over to Jumbo his guns and borrowed the whip.

Gurley backed off in a sudden alarm. "Don't you touch me. Don't you dass touch me. I'll cut yore heart out if you do."

The lash whistled through the air and wound itself cruelly round the legs of the bully. The man gave a yell of rage and pain. He lunged forward to close with Roberts, and met a driving left that caught him between the eyes and flung him back. Before he could recover, the Ranger had him by the collar at arm's length, and the torture of the whip was maddening him. He cursed, struggled, raved, threatened, begged for mercy. He tried to fling himself to the ground. He wept tears of agony. But there was no escape from the deadly blacksnake, that was cutting his flesh to ribbons.

Roberts, sick at the thing he had been doing, flung the shrieking man aside and leaned up against the wall of the store. Jumbo came across to him and offered his friend a drink.

"You'll feel better if you take a swallow of old forty-rod," he promised.

The younger man shook his head. "Much obliged, old-timer. I'm all right now. It was a kind of sickening job, but I had to do it or kill him."

"What was it all about?" asked Jumbo eagerly. The fat line-rider was a good deal of a gossip and loved to know the inside of every story.

Jack cast about for a reason. "He—he said I had red hair."

"Well, you old son of a mule-skinner, what's the matter with that? You have, aint you?" demanded the amazed Wilkins.

"Mebbe I have, but he can't tell me so."

That was all the satisfaction the public

ever got. It did a good deal of guessing, however, and none of it came near the truth.

CHAPTER XXIII

"BULLY PUSS MEN"

JUMBO WILKINS came wheezing into the Sunset Trail corral, where Jack Roberts was mending a broken bridle.

"Lo, Tex. Looks like you're gitting popular, son. Folks a-coming in fifty miles for to have a little talk with you."

The eyes of the ranger grew intelligent. He knew Jumbo's habit of mind. The big line-rider always made the most of any news he might have.

"Friends of mine?" asked Jack casually.

"Well, mebbe friends aint just the word. Say acquaintances. You know 'em well enough to shoot at and to blacksnake 'em, but not well enough to drink with."

"Did they say they wanted to see me?"

"A nod is as good as a wink to a blind bronc'. They said they'd come to make you hard to find."

The ranger hammered down a rivet carefully. "Many of 'em?"

"Two this trip. One of 'em used to think yore topknot was red. I dunno what he thinks now."

"And the other?"

"Carries the brand of Overstreet."

"Where are these anxious citizens, Jumbo?"

"Last I saw of them they were at the Bird-cage lapping up another of the same. They've got business with Clint Wadley too, they said."

Jack guessed that business as blackmail. It occurred to him that since these visitors had come to town to see him, he had better gratify their desire promptly. Perhaps after they had talked with him they might not have time to do their business with Wadley.

As Jumbo waddled uptown beside him, Roberts arranged the details of his little plan. They separated at the corner of the street a block from the Bird-cage. Wilkins had offered to lend a hand, but his friend defined the limit of the help he might give.

"You come in, shake hands with me, and ask that question. Then you're through. Understand, Jumbo?"

"Sure. But I want to tell you again Overstreet is no false-alarm bad-man. He'll fight at the drop of the hat. That's

his reputation, anyhow—wears 'em low and comes a-shooting.”

“I’ll watch out for him. And I’ll look for you in about three minutes.”

“Me, I’ll be there, son, and I wish you the best of luck.”

GURLEY was at the bar facing the door when the ranger walked into the Birdcage. He had been just ready to gulp down another drink, but as his eyes fell on this youth who came forward with an elastic step, the heart died within him. It had been easy while the liquor was in his brain to brag of what he meant to do. It was quite another thing to face in battle this brown, competent youth who could hit silver dollars in the air with a revolver.

His companion read in Gurley’s sallow face the dismay that had attacked him. Overstreet turned and faced the newcomer. The outlaw was a short, heavy-set man with remarkably long arms. He had come from Trinidad, Colorado, and brought with him the reputation of a killer. His eyes looked hard at the red-haired youngster, but he made no comment.

Jack spoke to the bartender. He looked at neither of the bad-men, but he was very coolly and alertly on guard.

“Joe, I left my blacksnake at home,” he said. “Have you got one handy?”

“Some guys are lucky, Steve,” jeered Overstreet, taking his cue from the ranger. “Because you fell over a box and this fellow beat you up while you was down, he thinks he’s a regular go-getter. He looks to me like a counterfeit four-bit piece, if anybody asks you.”

Jumbo Wilkins puffed into the place and accepted the Ranger’s invitation to take a drink.

“What makes you so gaunted, Jack? You look right peaked,” he commented as they waited for their drinks.

“Scared stiff, Jumbo. I hear two wild and woolly bad-men are after me. One is a tall, lopsided, cock-eyed rooster, and the other is a hammered-down sawed-off runt. They sure have got me good and scared. I’ve been running ever since I heard they were in town.”

Gurley gulped down his drink and turned toward the door hastily. “Come, let’s go, Overstreet. I got to see a man.”

The Texan and the Coloradoan looked at each other with steel-cold eyes. They measured each other in deadly silence, and while one might have counted twenty, the

shadow of death hovered over the room. Then Overstreet made his choice. The bragging had all been done by Gurley. He could save his face without putting up a fight.

“Funny how some folks are all blown up by a little luck,” he sneered, and he followed his friend to the street.

“You got them buffaloed sure, Jack. Tell me how you do it,” demanded Jumbo with a fat grin.

“I’m the law, Jumbo.”

“Go tell that to the Mexicans, son. What do you reckon a killer like Overstreet cares for the law? He figured you might down him before he could gun you—didn’t want to risk an even break with you.”

The ranger poured his untasted liquor into the spittoon and settled the bill. “Think I’ll drop around to the Last Chance and see if my birds have lit again.”

AT the Last Chance Jack found his friend the ex-Confederate doing business with another cattleman.

“I’d call that a sorry-looking lot, Winters,” he was saying. “I know a jackpot bunch of cows when I see them. They look to me like they been fed on short grass and shin oak.” His face lighted at sight of the ranger. “Hello, brindle-haid! Didn’t know you was in town.”

The quick eye of the officer had swept over the place and found the two men he wanted sitting inconspicuously at a small table.

“I’m not here for long, Sam. Two genuine blown-in-the-bottle bad-men are after my scalp. They’re running me out of town. Seen anything of ’em? They belong to the Dinsmore outfit.”

The old soldier looked at him with a sudden startled expression. He knew well what men were sitting against the wall a few steps from him. This was fighting talk, and bullets were likely to be flying soon.

“You don’t look to me like you’re hittin’ yore heels very fast to make a get-away, Jack,” he said dryly.

“I’m sure on the jump. They’re bully-puss kind of men. If I never get out of town, ship my saddle in a gunny-sack to my brother at Dallas.”

“Making yore will, are you?” inquired Joe Johnston’s former trooper.

The red-haired man grinned. “I got to make arrangements. They came here to

get me. Two of them—bad-men with blood in their eyes.” He hummed, with jaunty insolence:

“He’s a killer and a hater!
He’s the great annihilator!
He’s a terror of the boundless prai-ree.

“That goes double. I’m certainly one anxious citizen. Don’t you let them hurt me, Sam.”

There was a movement at the table where the two men were sitting. One of them had slid from his chair and was moving toward the back door.

The ranger pretended to catch sight of him for the first time. “Hello, Gurley! What’s yore hurry? Got to see another man, have you?”

The rustler did not wait to answer. He vanished through the door and fled down the alley in the direction of the corral. Overstreet could do as he pleased, but he intended to slap a saddle on his horse and make tracks for the cap-rock country.

Overstreet himself was not precisely comfortable in his mind, but he did not intend to let a smooth-faced boy run him out of the gambling-house before a dozen witnesses. If he had to fight, he would fight. But in his heart he cursed Gurley for a yellow-backed braggart. The fellow had got him into this and then turned tail. The man from Colorado wished devoutly that Pete Dinsmore were beside him.

“You’re talking at me, young fellow. Listen: I aint looking for any trouble with you—none a-tall. But I’m not Steve Gurley. Where I come from, folks grow man-size. Don’t lean on me too hard. I’m liable to decrease the census of red-haired guys.” Overstreet rose and glared at him, but at the same time one hand was reaching for his hat.

“You leaving town too, Mr. Overstreet?” inquired the ranger.

“What’s it to you? I’ll go when I’m ready.”

“We shall meet but we shall miss you—there will be one vacant chair,” murmured the young officer, misquoting a song of the day. “Seems like there’s nothing to this life but meeting and parting. Here you are one minute, and in a quarter of an hour you’re hitting the high spots trying to catch up with friend Steve.”

“Who said so? I’ll go when I’m good and ready,” reiterated the bad-man.

“Well, yore bronc’ needs a gallop to take the kinks out of his legs. Give my regards

to the Dinsmores and tell them that Tascosa is no sort of place for shorthorns or tin horns.”

“Better come and give them regards yore own self.”

“Maybe I will, one of these glad mo’nings. So long, Mr. Overstreet. Much obliged to you and Steve for not massacreeing me.”

The ironic thanks of the ranger were lost, for the killer from Colorado was already swaggering out of the front door.

The old Confederate gave a whoop of delight. “I never did see yore match, you doggoned old scalawag. You’d better go up into Mexico and make Billy the Kid eat out of yore hand. This tame country is no place for you, Jack.”

Roberts made his usual patient explanation. “It’s the law. They can’t buck the whole Lone Star State. If he shot me, a whole passel of rangers would be on his back pretty soon. So he hits the trail instead.” He turned to Ridley, who had just come into the Last Chance. “Art, will you keep cases on Overstreet and see whether he leaves town right away?”

A quarter of an hour later Ridley was back with information.

“Overstreet’s left town—lit out after Gurley.”

The old Rebel grinned. “He wont catch him this side of the cap rock.”

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

MR. PETER DINSMORE was of both an impulsive and obstinate disposition. He wanted what he wanted when he wanted it. Somewhere he had heard that if a man desired his business well done, he must do it himself. Gurley had proved a poor messenger. Peter would call upon Clint Wadley in person and arrange an armistice.

He had another and a more urgent reason for getting to town promptly. A jumping toothache had kept him awake all night. After he reached Tascosa, Dinsmore was annoyed to find that Doctor Bridgman had ridden down the river to look after the fractured leg of a mule-skinner.

“Isn’t there anyone else in this condemned burg can pull teeth?” he demanded irritably of the bartender at the Last Chance.

"There certainly is. Buttermilk Brown is a sure-enough dentist. He had to take to bullwhacking for to make a living, but I reckon he's not forgot how. You'll probably find him sleeping off a hang-over at the Bird-cage."

This prophecy proved true, but Dinsmore was not one to let trifles turn him aside. He led the reluctant ex-dentist to a water-trough and soused his head under the pump.

"Is that a plenty?" he asked presently, desisting from his exercise with the pump-handle.

Buttermilk sputtered a half-drowned assent. His nerves were still jumpy, and his head was not clear, but he had had enough cold water. Heroic treatment of this sort was not necessary to fit him for pulling a tooth.

They adjourned to the room where Buttermilk had stored his professional tools. Dinsmore indicated the back tooth that had to come out. The dentist peered at it, inserted his forceps and set to work. The tooth came out hard, but at last he exhibited its long prongs to the tortured victim.

"We get results," said Buttermilk proudly.

"How much?" asked Pete.

It happened that the dentist did not know his patient. He put a price of five dollars on the job. Dinsmore paid it and walked with Buttermilk to the nearest saloon for a drink.

Peter needed a little bracer. The jumping pain still pounded like a piledriver at his jaw. While the bartender was handing him a glass and a bottle, Dinsmore caressed tenderly the aching emptiness and made a horrible discovery. Buttermilk Brown had pulled the wrong tooth.

Considering his temperament, Peter showed remarkable self-restraint. He did not slay Buttermilk violently and instantly. Instead he led him back to the room of torture.

"You pulled the wrong tooth, you drunken wreck," he said in effect but in much more emphatic words. "Now yank out the right one, and if you make another mistake—"

He did not finish the threat, but it is possible that Buttermilk understood. The dentist removed with difficulty the diseased molar.

"Well, we're through now," he said cheerfully. "I don't know as I ought to

charge you for that last one. I'll leave that to you to say."

"We're not quite through," corrected the patient. "I'm going to teach you to play monkeyshines with Pete Dinsmore's teeth." He laid a large revolver on the table and picked up the forceps. "Take that chair, you bow-legged, knock-kneed, run-down runt."

BUTTERMILK protested in vain. He begged the bad-man for mercy with tears in his eyes.

"I'm going to do Scripture to you, and then some," explained Dinsmore. "It says in the Bible a tooth for a tooth, but I aim to pay good measure."

The amateur dentist pulled four teeth and played no favorites. A molar, a bicuspid, a canine and an incisor were laid in succession on the table.

Buttermilk Brown wept with rage and pain.

"Four times five is twenty. Dig up twenty dollars for professional services," said Peter.

His tearful patient paid the fee. This was the most painful, violent, and high-handed episode of Buttermilk's young life. Never in Shelbyville, Indiana, from which town he had migrated hopefully westward with his diploma, had such outrages ever been heard of.

The instruments of Providence are sometimes strange ones. Nobody would have picked Pete Dinsmore for a reformer, but he changed the course of one young dentist's life. Buttermilk fled from the Southwest in horror, took the pledge eagerly, returned to Shelbyville and married the belle of the town. He became a specialist in bridge-work, of which he carried a golden example in his own mouth. His wife has always understood that Dr. Brown—nobody ever called him Buttermilk in his portly, prosperous Indiana days—lost his teeth trying to save a child from a runaway. Be that as it may, there is no record that he ever again pulled the wrong tooth for a client.

Having completed his deed of justice, Dinsmore in high good humor with himself set out to call on Clint Wadley. He had made an inoffensive human being suffer, and that is always something to a man's credit. If he could not do any better, Pete would bully a horse, but he naturally preferred humans. They were more sensitive to pain.

CHAPTER XXV

CLINT FREES HIS MIND

WADLEY was sitting on the porch with Ramona. He was still a semi-invalid, and when he exercised too much, his daughter scolded him like the little mother she was.

"Keep me here much longer, and I'll turn into a regular old gossip in breeches," he complained. "I'll be Jumbo Wilkins Number Two, like as not."

"Is Jumbo a specialist in gossip?" asked Ramona. She liked to get her father at reminiscences. It helped to pass time that hung heavy on his hands.

"Is he? Girl, he could talk a hind leg off'm a buckskin mule, Jumbo could." He stopped to chuckle. "Oncet, when we were driving a bunch of yearlings on the Brazos, one of the boys picked up an old skull. Prob'ly some poor fellow killed by the Indians. Anyhow, that night when Jumbo was wound up good, one of the lads pretended to discover that skull and brought it into the camp-fire light. Some one had wrote on it: 'Talked to death by Jumbo Wilkins.'"

Mona rather missed the point. She was watching a man slouching down the road toward them. He was heavy-set and unwieldy, and he wore a wrinkled suit of butternut jeans.

The eyes of the cattleman chilled. "You go into the house, Mona. That fellow's Pete Dinsmore. I don't want you to meet him."

"Don't you, Dad?" The heart of the girl fluttered at sight of this man who had nearly killed her father, but it was not fear but anger that burned in her eyes. "I'm going to sit right here. What does he want? He's not coming—to make trouble, is he?"

"No. We've got business to settle. You run along in."

"I know what your business is. It's—about Ford."

He looked at her in surprised dismay. "Who told you that, honey?"

"I'll tell you about that after he's gone. I want to stay, Dad, to show him that I know all about it, and that we're not going to let him carry out any blackmailing scheme against us."

DINSMORE nodded grouchyly as he came up the walk to the house. Wadley did not ask him to sit down, and since

there were no unoccupied chairs, the rustler remained standing.

"I got to have a talk with you, Clint," the outlaw said. "Send yore girl into the house."

"She'll listen to anything you have to say, Dinsmore. Get through with it soon as you can, and hit the trail," said the cattleman curtly.

The other man flushed darkly. "You talk mighty biggity these days. I remember when you wasn't nothing but a busted line-rider."

"Maybe so. And before that I was a soldier in the army while you was doing guerrilla jayhawking."

"Go ahead. Say anything you've a mind to, Clint. I'll make you pay before I'm through with you," answered the bad-man venomously.

"You will if you can; I know that. You're a bad lot, Dinsmore, you and yore whole outfit. I'm glad Ellison and his rangers are going to clear you out of the country. A sure-enough good riddance, if anyone asks me."

The cattleman looked hard at him. He too had been a fighting man, but it was not his reputation for gameness that trained the ruffian. Wadley was a notch too high for him. He could kill another bad-man or some drunken loafer and get away with it. But he had seen the sentiment of the country when his brother had wounded the cattleman. It would not do to go too far. Times were changing in the Panhandle. Henceforth lawlessness would have to travel by night and work under cover. With the coming of the rangers, men who favored law were more outspoken. Dinsmore noticed that they deferred less to him, partly, no doubt, because of what that fool boy Roberts had done without having yet had to pay for it.

"That's what I've come to see you about, Wadley. I'm not looking for trouble, but I never ran away from it in my life. No living man can lay on me without hell popping. You know it."

"Is that what you came to tell me, Dinsmore?" asked the owner of the A T O, his mouth set grim and hard.

There was an ugly look on the face of the outlaw, a cold glitter of anger in his deep-set eyes. "I hear you set the world and all by that girl of yours there. Better send her in, Wadley. I'm loaded with straight talk."

The girl leaned forward in the chair.

She looked at him with a flash of disdainful eyes in which was a touch of feminine ferocity, but she let her father answer the man.

"Go on," said the old Texan. "Onload what you've got to say, and then pull yore freight."

"Suits me, Clint. I'm here to make a bargain with you. Call Ellison off. Make him let me and my friends alone. If you don't, we're going to talk—about yore boy Ford." The man's upper lip lifted in a grin. He looked first at the father, then at the daughter.

THERE was a tightening of the soft, round throat, but she met his look without wincing. The pallor of her face lent accent to the contemptuous loathing of the slender girl.

"What are you going to say—that you murdered him, shot him down from behind?" demanded Wadley.

"That's a lie, Clint. You know who killed him—and why he did it. Ford couldn't let the girls alone. I warned him as a friend, but he was hell-bent on having his own way."

The voice of the cattleman trembled. "Some day—I'm going to hunt you down like a wolf for what you did to my boy."

A lump jumped to Ramona's throat. She slipped her little hand into the big one of her father, and with it went all her sympathy and all her love.

"You're way off, Wadley. The boy was our friend. Why should we shoot him?" asked the man from the chaparral.

"Because he interfered with you when you robbed my messenger."

The startled eyes of the outlaw jumped to meet those of the cattleman. For a fraction of a section he was caught off his guard. Then the film of wary craftiness covered them again.

"That's plumb foolishness, Clint. The Mexican—what's his name?—killed Ford because he was jealous, and if it hadn't been for you, he'd 'a' paid for it long ago. But that aint what I came to talk about. I'm here to tell you that I've got evidence to prove that Ford was a rustler and a hold-up. If it comes to a show-down, we're going to tell what we know. Mebbe you want folks to know what kind of a brother yore girl had. That's up to you."

Wadley exploded in a sudden fury of passion. "I'll make no bargain with the murderer of my boy. Get out of here, you

damned yellow wolf. I don't want any truck with you at all till I get a chance to stomp you down like I would a rattler."

The bad-man bared his fangs. For one moment of horror Ramona thought he was going to strike like the reptile to which her father had compared him. He glared at the cattleman, the impulse strong in him to kill and be done with it. But the other side of him—the caution that had made it possible for him to survive so long in a world of violent men—held his hand until the blood-lust passed from his brain.

"You've said a plenty," he snarled thickly. "Me, I've made my last offer to you. It's war between me 'n' you from now on."

He turned away and went slouching down the path to the road.

THE two on the porch watched him out of sight. The girl had slipped inside her father's arm and was sobbing softly on his shoulder.

"There, Honeybug, now don't you—don't you," Clint comforted. "He cayn't do us any harm. Ellison's hot on his trail. I'll give him six months, and then he's through. Don't you fret, sweetheart. Daddy will look out for you all right."

"I—I wasn't thinking about me," she whispered.

Both of them were thinking of the dead boy and the threat to blacken his memory, but neither of them confessed it to the other. Wadley cast about for something to divert her mind and found it in an unanswered question of his own.

"You was going to tell me how come you to know what he wanted to talk with me about," the father reminded her.

"You remember that day when Arthur Ridley brought me home."

He nodded assent.

"One of the Dinsmore gang—the one they call Steve Gurley—met me on the street. He was drunk, and he stopped me to tell me about—Ford. I tried to pass, and he wouldn't let me. He frightened me. Then Arthur and Mr. Roberts came round the corner. Arthur came home with me, and—you know what happened in front of McGuffey's store."

The face of the girl had flushed a sudden scarlet. Her father stared at her in an amazement that gave way to understanding. Through his veins there crashed a wave of emotion. If he had held any secret grudge against Tex Roberts, it

vanished forever that moment. This was the kind of son he would have liked to have himself.

"By ginger, that was what he beat Gurlley up for! Nobody knows why, and Roberts kept the real reason under his hat. He's a prince, Jack Roberts is. I did that boy a wrong, Mona, and guessed it all the time, just because he had a mix-up with Ford. He wasn't to blame for that anyhow, I've been told."

Ramona felt herself unaccountably trembling. There was a queer little lump in her throat, but she knew it was born of gladness.

"He's been good to me," she said, and told of the experience with the traveling salesman on the stage.

Clint Wadley laughed. "I never saw that boy's beat. He's got everything a fellow needs to win. I can tell you one thing; he's going to get a chance to run the A T O for me before he's forty-eight hours older. He'll be a good buy, no matter what salary he sticks me for."

Mona became aware that she was going to break down—and "make a little fool of herself," as she would have put it.

"I forgot to water my canary," she announced abruptly.

The girl jumped up, ran into the house and to her room. But if the canary was suffering from thirst, it remained neglected. Ramona's telltale face was buried in a pillow. She was not quite ready yet to look into her own eyes and read the message they told.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HOLD-UP

WHEN Wadley made his offer to Jack Roberts, the face of that young man lighted up at once. But without hesitation he refused the chance to manage the A T O ranch.

"Sorry, but I can't work for you, Mr. Wadley."

The big Texan stiffened. "All right," he said huffily. "Just as you please. I'm not going to beg you on my knees to take the best job in the Panhandle. Plenty of good men want it."

The frank smile of the ranger was disarming. "They don't want it any worse than I do, Mr. Wadley. I'm not a fool. Just because we had a difference once, I'm not standing on my dignity. Nothing like that. You're offering me a big chance—

the biggest I'm ever likely to get. When you pick me to boss the A T O under yore orders, you pay me a sure-enough compliment, and I'd be plumb glad to say yes."

"Well, why don't you?"

"Because the rangers have got an unfinished job before them here, and I'm not going to leave Captain Ellison in the lurch. I'll stick to my dollar a day till we've made a round-up."

The cattleman clapped him on the shoulder. "That's right, boy. That's the way to talk. Make yore clean-up, then come see me. I won't promise to hold this job open, but I want you to talk with me before you sign up with anyone else."

But the weeks passed, and the Dinsmores still operated in the land. They worked under cover, less openly than in the old days, but they were still a storm-center of trouble. It was well known that they set the law at defiance, but no man who could prove it would produce evidence.

Meanwhile spring had made way for summer, and summer was beginning to burn into autumn. The little force of rangers rode the land and watched for that false move which some day the Dinsmores would make to bring them within reach of the law. On one of its trips in the early fall, the Clarendon stage left town almost half an hour late. It carried with it a secret, but everybody on board had heard a whisper of it. There was a gold shipment in the box consigned to Tascosa. A smooth-faced ranger sat beside the driver with a rifle across his knees. He had lately been appointed to the force, and this was one of his first assignments. Perhaps that was why Arthur Ridley was a little conscious of his new buckskin suit and the importance of his job.

The passengers were three. One was a jolly Irish mule-skinner with a picturesque vocabulary and an inimitable brogue. The second wore the black suit and low-crowned hat of a clergyman, and yellow goggles to protect his eyes from the sun. He carried a roll of Scriptural charts such as are used in Sunday schools. The third was an angular and spectacled school-marm, for Tascosa was going to celebrate by starting a school.

Most of those on board were a trifle nervous. The driver was not quite at his ease; nor was the shotgun messenger. For somehow word had got out a day or two in advance of the gold-shipment that it was to be sent on that date. The passengers,

too, had faint doubts about the wisdom of going to Tascosa on that particular trip.

THE first twenty miles of the journey were safely covered. The stage drew near to the place where now is located the famous Goodnight cattalo ranch.

From the farther side of a cut in the road came a sharp order to the driver. Two men had ridden out from the brush and were moving beside the stage. Each of them carried a rifle.

The driver leaned backward on the reins with a loud "Whoa!" It was an article of faith with him never to argue with a road-agent.

Ridley swung round to fire. From the opposite side of the road a shot rang out. Two more horsemen had appeared. The reins slid from the hands of the driver, and he himself from the seat. His body struck the wheel on the way to the ground. The bullet intended for the armed guard had passed through his head.

In the packed moments that followed, a dozen shots were fired, most of them by the outlaws, two by the man on the box. A bullet struck Arthur in the elbow, and the shock of it for a time paralyzed his arm. The rifle clattered against the singletree in its fall. But the shortest of the outlaws was sagging in his saddle and clutching at the pommel to support himself.

From an unexpected quarter there came a diversion. With one rapid gesture the man in the clergyman's garb had brushed aside his yellow goggles; with another he had stripped the outer cover of charts from his roll and revealed a sawed-off shotgun. As he stepped down to the road, he fired from his hip. The whole force of the load of buckshot took the nearest outlaw in the vitals and lifted him from his horse. Before he struck the ground he was dead.

In the flash of an eye the tide of battle had turned. The surprise of seeing the clergyman galvanized into action tipped the scale. One moment the treasure lay unguarded within reach of the outlaws; the next saw their leader struck down as by a bolt from heaven.

The lank bandit ripped out a sudden oath of alarm from behind the handkerchief he wore as a mask and turned his horse in its tracks. He dug home his spurs and galloped for the brow of the hill. The other unwounded robber backed away more deliberately, covering the retreat of his injured companion. Presently they too

had passed over the top of the hill and disappeared.

The ex-clergyman turned to the treasure-guard. "How bad it is with you, Art?" he asked gently.

That young man grinned down a little wanly at Jack Roberts. He felt suddenly nauseated and ill. This business of shooting men and being shot at filled him with horror.

"Not so bad. I got it in the arm, Jack. Poor old Hank will never drive again."

The ranger who had been camouflaged as a clergyman stooped to examine the driver. That old-timer's heart had stopped beating. "He's gone on his last long trip, Art."

"This school-marm lady has fainted," announced the mule-skinner.

"She's got every right in the world to faint. In Iowa, where she comes from, folks live in peace. Better sprinkle water on her face, Mike."

Jack moved over to the dead outlaw and lifted the bandanna mask from the face. "Pete Dinsmore, just like I thought," he told Ridley. "Well, he had to have it—couldn't learn his lesson any other way."

Roberts drove the stage with its load of dead and wounded back to Clarendon. As quickly as possible he gathered a small posse to follow the bandits. Hampered as the outlaws were with a badly wounded man, there was a good chance of running them to earth at last. Before night he and his deputies were far out on the plains following a trail that led toward Palo Duro Cañon.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MAN WITH THE YELLOW STREAK

NIGHT fell on both a dry and fireless camp for the outlaws who had tried to rob the Clarendon-Tascosa stage. They had covered a scant twenty miles instead of the eighty they should have put behind them. For Dave Overstreet had been literally dying in the saddle every step of the way.

He had clenched his teeth and clung to the pommel desperately. Once he had fainted and slid from his seat. But the bandits could not stop and camp, though Dinsmore kept the pace to a walk.

"Once we reach Palo Duro, we'll hold up among the rocks and fix you up fine, Dave," his companion kept promising.

"Sure, Homer. I'm doing dandy," the

wounded man would answer from white, bloodless lips.

The yellow streak in Gurley was to the fore all day. It evidenced itself in his precipitate retreat from the field of battle—a flight which carried him miles across the desert before he dared wait for his comrades. It showed again in the proposal which he made early in the afternoon to Dinsmore.

The trio of outlaws had been moving very slowly on account of the suffering of the wounded man. Gurley kept looking back nervously every few minutes to see if pursuers were visible. After a time he sidled up to Dinsmore and spoke low.

"They'll get us sure if we don't move livelier, Homer."

"How in Mexico can we move faster when Dave can't stand it?" asked Dinsmore impatiently.

"He's a mighty sick man. He hadn't ought to be on horseback at all. He needs a doctor."

"Will you go and get him one?" demanded Homer with sour sarcasm.

"What I say is, let's fix him up comfortable, and after a while mebbe a posse will come along and pick him up. They can look after him better than we got a chance to do," argued Gurley.

"And mebbe a posse wont find him—what then?" rasped Dinsmore.

"They will. If they don't, he'll die easy. This is sure enough hell for him now."

"All right. Shall we stop right here with him?"

"That wouldn't do any good, Homer. The rangers would get us too."

"I see. Yore idea is to let Dave die easy while we're saving our hides. Steve, you've got a streak in you a foot wide."

"Nothing like that," protested the man with the eyes that didn't track. "I'd stay by him if it was any use. But it aint. Why for should you and me stretch a rope when we can't help Dave a mite? It aint reasonable."

Overstreet could not hear what was said, but he guessed the tenor of their talk. "Go ahead, boys, and leave me. I'm about done anyhow," he said.

"If Gurley has a mind to go, he can. I'll stick," answered Dinsmore gruffly.

BUT Gurley did not want to go alone. There were possible dangers to be faced that two men could meet a good deal more safely than one. It might be that they

would have to stand off a posse. They might meet Indians. The sallow outlaw felt that he could not afford just now to break with his companion. It was not likely that the rangers would reach them that night, and he guessed craftily that Overstreet would not live till morning. The wound was a very serious one. The man had traveled miles before Dinsmore could stop to give him such slight first aid as was possible, and the jolting of the long horseback-ride had made it difficult to stop the bleeding which broke out again and again.

After Dinsmore had eased the wounded man from his horse at dusk and laid him on a blanket with a saddle for a pillow, Overstreet had smiled faintly up at him.

"It wont be for long, Homer. You'll be shet of me right soon now," he murmured.

"Don't you talk thataway, Dave. I don't want to be shet of you. After a good night's rest you'll feel a new man."

"No, I've got more than I can pack. It wont be long now. I'm right comfortable here. Steve's in a hurry. You go on and hit the trail with him."

"Where did you get the notion I was yellow, old-timer? I've hunted in couples with you for years. Do you reckon I'm going to run like a cur now you've struck a streak of bad luck?" asked Dinsmore huskily.

The dying man smiled his thanks. "You always was a stubborn son-of-a-gun, Homer. But Steve, he wants—"

"Steve can go to—Hell Creek, if he's so set on traveling in a hurry. Here, drink some of this water."

The blanket of darkness fell over the land. Stars came out, at first one or two, then by thousands, till the night was full of them. The wounded man dozed and stirred and dozed again. It was plain that the sands of his life were running low. Dinsmore, watching beside him, knew that was the ebb tide.

A little after midnight Overstreet roused himself, recognized the watcher, and nodded good-by.

"So long, Homer. I'm hitting the home trail now."

His hand groped feebly till it found that of his friend. A few minutes later he died, still holding the strong warm hand of the man who was nursing him.

DINSMORE crossed the hands of the dead outlaw and covered him with a blanket.

"Saddle up, Steve," he told Gurley.

While he waited for the horses, he looked down with a blur over his eyes. He had ridden hard and crooked trails all his life, but he had lost that day his brother and his best friend. The three of them had been miscreants. They had broken the laws of society and had fought against it because of the evil in them that had made them a destructive force. But they had always played fair with each other. They had at least been loyal to their own bad code. Now he was alone, for Gurley did not count.

Presently the other man stood at his elbow with the saddled horses. Dinsmore swung to the saddle and rode away. Not once did he look back, but he had no answer for Gurley's cheerful prediction that now they would reach Palo Duro Cañon all right and would hole up there till the pursuit had spent itself, after which they could amble down across the line to old Mexico or could strike the Pecos and join Billy the Kid. Only one idea was fixed definitely in his mind, that as soon as he could, he would part company with the man riding beside him.

When day came, it found them riding westward in the direction of Deaf Smith County. The Cañon was not far south of them, but there was no need of plunging into it yet. The pursuit must be hours behind them, even if their trail had not been lost altogether. They rode easily, prepared to camp at the first stream or water-hole they reached.

"We'll throw off here," Dinsmore decided at the first brook they reached.

They unsaddled and hobbled their horses. While Gurley lighted a fire for the coffee, the other man strolled up the creek to get a shot at any small game he might find. Presently a brace of prairie chickens rose with a whirl of wings. The rifle cracked, and one of them fell fluttering to the ground. Dinsmore moved forward to pick up the bird.

Abruptly he stopped in his stride. He fancied he heard a faint cry. It came again, carried on the light morning breeze. He could have sworn that it was the call of a woman for help.

Dinsmore grew wary. He knew the tricks of the Indians, the wily ways with which they lured men into ambush. There had been rumors for days that the Indians were out again. Yet it was not like Indians to announce their presence before they pounced upon their prey. He moved very slowly forward under cover of the brush along the bed of the stream.

The voice came to him again, closer this time, and in spite of the distance clear as a bell. It was surely that of a white woman in trouble. Still he did not answer as he crept forward up the stream.

Then he caught sight of her—a girl, slim and young, stumbling forward through the grass, exhaustion showing in every line of the body.

She stretched out her hands to him across the space between, with a little despairing cry.

THE dramatic conclusion of this engrossing novel will appear in the next issue of *THE BLUE BOOK*. Along with it will be: the first third of "The Great Loudwater Mystery," a remarkable novel by Edgar Jepson, author of "The Intervening Lady," "Happy Pollyooly," etc.; another of Edison Marshall's impressive stories "From a Frontiersman's Diary;" an extraordinary novel of the San Francisco Chinese quarter, "Tears of the Poppy," by Lemuel Lawrence de Bra; one of I. K. Friedman's amusing "Adventures in Vaudevillainy;" "Senator Logwood Takes the Case," the first of a delightful new group of Texas stories by Chester Crowell; one of Holman Day's inimitable humoresques; the first of some fine stories by Paul Hervey Fox; and many other stories of the sort that have won for *THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE* its preëminent place as a purveyor of fascinating fiction.

Leatherneck Tales

Without Leave



THERE'S a thrill in this vivid story of the men who are "soldier and sailor too." You'll find here an adventure after your own heart.

by
Barney Furey

THE office of the Chief Paymaster of the United States Marine Corps in Paris stands at the very center of that city's district of jollity. At one side rolls the ever-honking, noisy line of chugging taxicabs that makes its continual slow and raucous progress along the Place de l'Opéra; on the other are the shops of the Rue de la Paix, and the milling throngs of the Metro stations—all a conglomerate mass of humanity, of drinking at the tables which line the sidewalks, of flirting, amorous, petite young ladies, of the countless colors of the uniforms of an Allied world; of laughter and pleasure and care-free *insouciance*. And high above all this is the office of the Paymaster, with its big windows and jutting balconies, upon the most prominent of which stood two figures, Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan of the United States Marines, in Paris on ten days' leave.

Time was when they had been in this very vicinity before, but that was when Paris was dark o' nights, when the *avions* were sure to circle overhead with the coming of each full moon, and when the shells were thudding with a steady regularity from the Big Bertha in the Bois de St. Gobain. Those had been the days of hard, grim faces, the days of the German ad-

vance upon the Chemin des Dames, the crumpling of the Fifth Army, the rolling tide that swept on and on toward the smooth, peaceful-appearing valley of the Marne, and the consequent goal of Paris. Those had been the days of Belleau Wood, of Lucy-le-Bocage, and Torcy and Bouresches, days of death for the Fourth Brigade of the Second Division, the Fifth and Sixth regiments of Marines; days in which whole companies vanished, when others went on with seventy-seven per cent of their entire number missing from wounds or worse, when the bodies of fallen soldiers of the sea dotted every approach to the evil Forest of Belleau, and when a Devil Dog hated a wheat-field, with its accompanying machine-gun fire from the wood beyond, with a repugnance that knows no comparison.

Those had been dark days for Ed Delaney and for Mickey Brogan—but they were over now, past and gone. Then they had been in khaki, a part of the American Expeditionary Forces; to-day they were in the glorious "blues" of shipboard, a portion of the Marine guard of the U. S. S. *New Mexico*, and in Paris on furlough.

Truly enjoyable was the position in Paris of Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan. Their blue uniforms and their navy orders protected them from

the onslaughts of the eager military police that seemed to hover everywhere in search of prey for the gaping maw of the "Hotel" St. Anne or the ancient, moldy Bastile.

SO Ed Delaney and his bald companion stood looking complacently downward. They were free for ten days, they had francs in their pockets, and they were back in the territory where life once had been an inferno. It's only a matter of an hour and a half from Paris to the shell-pocked district of Château Thierry, Bouresches, and Belleau Wood, marked upon the maps as "Bois de la Brigade de Marine."

For a long time, they stood on the balcony, watching the crowds. Then Corporal Mickey Brogan looked over his shoulder to the office beyond, where a Marine sat humped at his desk, staring aimlessly at the work before him, yet doing nothing. Brogan nodded quickly.

"Lookut Bart Crandall," he said quietly. "He sure aint the same."

Ed Delaney turned.

"No more he is," came his answer. "He's playing seven kinds of a fool. But it's not his fault. When a man's got shell-shock—"

"Shell-shock? Then it's up to him to be classified and sent home."

"Yes, but when a fellow's letting something eat his heart out, he's going to stick around." Ed Delaney looked across the broad thoroughfare to the packed humanity of the Café de la Paix. "It's the shell-shock that's making him do it—and he's killing himself with brooding."

"For why?" Mickey Brogan looked up innocently. Ed Delaney flipped a speck of dust from his blue blouse.

"Maybe it's talking out of school," he said at last, "but I guess that if I can know it, nobody's going to be killed if you're in on it too. Suppose, for instance, that there was another Mickey Brogan. Suppose you were both corporals. Suppose the other fellow got bumped pretty hard and really didn't know what he was doing for a half-hour or so. Suppose all this time you're doing the greatest stuff in the world and a recommendation goes in for a D. S. C. for you—without mentioning the number of the company. Then, suppose that the D. S. C. goes to the other fellow, who doesn't know just what he was doing all that time, and who takes it, thinking he did this junk while he was kind of woozy from a wound. Then, suppose, on

top of that, just before the D. S. C.'s came around, you got a shell-shock."

"Gosh!" Mickey's face went mournful. "Is that what happened?"

"It is, you know."

"And Bart's too much of a real fellow to sail in and tell the truth?"

"Just that. The other man made good. And our Bart Crandall's breaking his own heart rather than break the heart of some one else."

FOR a moment they stood watching the man within. Then Ed Delaney shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said at last, "I'm sorry—but it aint any of our funeral. I've done everything I can. Went to him and told him that he ought to go see Major Wills and talk it over with him unofficially and confidentially. But he wouldn't do it. Said he was afraid that it might get the other guy in trouble."

"That's nut stuff."

"Sure it is," answered Delaney. "But you've got to remember that in these days, it's nuts to the nutty. Bart's gone—never will be any good, the Doc told me, unless something should bob up to make something turn over inside his head and make him snap out of his hop. Of course, that's on the Q. T.; he's supposed to have recovered. But as I said, it aint our funeral."

And to the Casino they went, to hum the music, to listen to the hastily improvised French jazz band, to stand at the funny little bar and drink their *grog américain*, then to wander forth to an appreciation of Paris.

Nor was it until three days later, after museums and bus trips and promenades, after visits to the Louvre, shopping excursions to the Galeries Lafayette, the Bon Marché and what not "just to get a few little gadgets for some one back home that asked me," after gawking trips through the Pantheon and Notre Dame, that Ed Delaney, his bald corporal by his side, again entered the offices of the Chief Paymaster, there to stop and stare at a name on the bulletin board. Corporal Bart Crandall was listed on that board, A. W. O. L.—absent without official leave!

"What's more, he's been gone since Tuesday morning," snapped Mickey Brogan. "The darned fool!"

"A man in his fix doesn't stop to figure things, Mickey," said Sergeant Delaney. "Let's see, when was it we was up here?"

"Monday—about noon."

"Remember how he looked then?"

"Like the last ten minutes of a misspent life."

"You said it. Well, that's the explanation. Ten to one he's— Come on with me," came the sudden order as the sergeant turned. "I'm going to need some moral assistance."

OBEDIENTLY Mickey followed, to the long, bevel-glassed door of the major's office, where the sergeant knocked timidly, then hesitatingly turned the knob as a voice sounded from within. A second more and they were facing the major.

"Sir," said the sergeant, "could Corporal Brogan and myself ask a personal favor unofficial and confidential-like?"

"Just as long as it isn't for money," the genial major answered jokingly. "The term of Paymaster is only a title, you know."

"Yes sir." Ed Delaney had regained his confidence. "But this is something else, sir. Corporal Crandall's listed on the board as A. W. O. L."

The major's expression changed. Sergeant Delaney started to finger his cap, then snapped back to attention.

"Sir," he began again, "we've both known Corporal Crandall for a long time, and we know that in his heart he's a faithful Marine. And if the major would give us some kind of an order that we could take out to Clingancourt Barracks, where we could search his effects—maybe, sir, we might find something that would give us some information as to where he went. Corporal Crandall hadn't been very well, sir, and—"

"Do you really know anything?" The major looked at them sharply.

"Sir," Sergeant Ed Delaney looked straight into the officer's eyes. "The major knows, I believe, that I have a good record. I wouldn't tell him a lie. I know, sir, that Corporal Crandall has been brooding over something that he has been trying to keep a secret. It's nothing to his discredit, sir—it's—it's a sort of a personal matter that I wouldn't have any right to tell—until I know more than I know now. But, sir, if the major orders me to tell, I'll—"

The officer reached for pen and paper.

"I'll make this unofficial," was his only answer. "Take this note to the commanding officer at Clingancourt."

FIVE minutes later, the two Marines were on their way to the barracks, far at the edge of town, Ed Delaney narrow-eyed and thoughtful, Mickey Brogan bobbing along at his side, asking one question after another, none of which was answered. A bus chugged into view. Delaney hailed it and settled down for a long ride. While Brogan, silent at last, slumped in the seat beside him, and stared at the advertisements.

A great distance, then the sergeant and corporal made their way to the office of the commanding officer of Clingancourt. Twenty minutes later, they were in the barracks, staring at the papers that littered the interior of the French suit-case which Crandall had bought on being ordered to Paris. Slowly Delaney studied the scattered lines, the marks, the crosses and coördinates. Then he turned.

"Guess we'd better take one or two of these with us" he said. "They might help out. Mickey, you can cut loose and go to a show or whatever you want to do. I've got to tear back to the Paymaster's office and talk to the major. I've got a hunch that I'd better spill the beans. So trot along. But whatever you do, set that mental alarm-clock of yours for six in the morning. We're going to take a chase out to Belleau Wood."

So it was that before Paris had finished blinking the next morning, a motorcycle side-car chugged out the Rue Lafayette, past the rumbling carts, and sleepy workers, on toward the Paris-Metz road. Once free of the great gates of the city, with their guards, their high mounds and sodden moats, Ed Delaney leaned forward and spurring the gas into the cylinders, urged the machine to its full speed, while the corporal bobbed and bounced in the side-car at his side.

Out to the clear stretch of the smooth macadam road they sped, and on toward Meaux. A twisting turn and they had passed through the little town, with its few jagged scars of the shelling of '1918, and were speeding toward La Ferté. There a sharp curve and they were headed toward Château Thierry, at last, to swing to the left onto a shell-torn road that led away from the main thoroughfare.

ARIDE of half an hour, and the machine stopped. They had reached the shell-scarred, battle-marked little town of Boursches, and while the garrulous old

women of the washing pool, struggling as they were to live in the place that the boche had marred beyond repair, gestured and wondered, Ed Delaney stepped from his seat and reached for one of the maps that he had taken out of the suit-case of the missing Marine.

"The marks on this map start here, Mickey," he said quietly. "It's a case of walking from now on—and we've got to take it cautious. I don't know what it all will lead to—it may not mean anything. But you and I both know that Bart Crandall's mind has been on Belleau Wood. His grip was full of just such truck as this, marked to show the progress of his company from June 6th on. Whether that means anything or not, I don't know. But there's one thing I'm sure of—his pack, his rifle, his ammunition belt, his bayonet and his tin hat are all missing from the barracks!"

Mickey Brogan squinted.

"You think he's come back—out here?"

But Delaney only smiled.

"I've told you all I know, Mickey," he answered. "Let's hit for the woods—then keep under cover."

Hurriedly they made their way out of the ragged, tattered little town and on toward Lucy-le-Bocage. A kilometer down the road, they stopped, as though by an invisible command. Before them, its smooth mounts protected by wires attached to roughhewn poles, was a little cemetery, its crosses standing as erect as a soldier at attention, its tiny flag-insignia shining bright and colorful above the dun of the earth beneath. Some flowers were growing beside the road, and the two Marines bent to pick them. Then, their heads bare, they laid the blooms before the graves.

"They were our buddies, Mickey," said Sergeant Delaney softly. Then they went on again.

A trickling stream, chattering and singing, crossed under a culvert. Ed Delaney, consulting his map, stopped, then swerved.

"This way, Mickey," he commanded. "Quiet stuff from here on!"

BEFORE them was the evil stretch of Belleau Wood, with its battle-deadened trees stretching upward like gaunt skeletons, with its dark shadows indicative of the blackness within, its ridges and brakes and masses of shrapnel-torn vegetation, its scars that even spring could not heal nor time take away; Belleau Wood, where the

thin line of United States Marines had met the advance of the Prussian Guard, as it rushed on toward Paris—and turned it back.

The two men were silent as they crossed the tiny stream that fringed the wood and made their way into the tangled briars and matted vegetation that covered every foot of the ground. They were silent with memory—memory of the days when they had lain in these very woods for days and nights without food, crouched in a fox-hole, listening to the telegraphic rattle of the concealed boche machine-guns, the "*ouie-e-e-e-e-e crack!*" of the whiz-bangs, the heavier boom of the "sea-bags," never knowing from one instant to the next when their turn would come, when they would join the lines of crumpled heaps that had once been men. Silent they were and grim, their eyes again assuming the old light of determination, their progress instinctively as guarded and as deliberate as though the rocky hills still hid the murderous boche, and the tangled briars again shielded those machine-guns that had spelled a constant death.

Slowly they made their way along, following here and there the scattered wires that once had acted as a guide for the stretcher-bearers, then veering to take advantage of each little clearing, each tiny space where progress was not a constant fight against the matted vines and shrapnel-torn shrubbery. On toward the rocky hills, slowly, more slowly—

"Hear that!"

It was Mickey Brogan, catching at the arm of his sergeant.

FROM far above had come the crack of a rifle. Ed Delaney pointed silently. Ten feet away was a white mark on the side of a tree, with the sap oozing from it—the scar of a rifle bullet, freshly made. The two men dropped to their stomachs, and the eyes of Sergeant Delaney of the United States Marines narrowed.

"Just what I thought," he whispered. "He's back here."

"And crazy," broke in Brogan. "He thinks he's—"

"Fighting it all over again. Must have sighted one of us just for a minute, then lost us again. Bart Crandall can shoot better than that."

Again from above came the sound of a rifle, and a twig fell to the ground. It was evident that the man above was shoot-

ing merely on supposition and without a chance for direct sight. Quickly the two men wriggled into the protection of a boulder. Then Delaney turned.

"Mickey," he said, "you've got a job cut out for you. I'm going around the hill here. You've—you've got to keep that rifle talking!"

"Want me to draw the fire?"

"Exactly. Bart's evidently up there in one of those old holes under the rocks where we laid on the night of the 22nd. We've got to get him out. But first, I've got to know exactly where he is. So, it's up to you. How's your German? Forgotten any of it?"

"Some, but not too much."

"Well, stir it up toot sweet! Then get yourself into a position where you'll be safe from bullets. Act like you're an *Oberleutnant* with a bunch of men. Then when you see me stand up on top of the ridge, you'll know I'm set. That's your signal to yell '*Kamerad*.' Get me?"

"I think so," answered Mickey. "You want to get him out of that hole."

"You've got it. So long. Keep your eyes open and"—again the rifle sounded from the top of the hill—"don't let that bird put any souvenirs in you."

They parted, Mickey Brogan to lie flat on the ground, watching the wriggling form of his companion until it had faded in the underbrush. Then he too started slowly forward.

AS for Sergeant Ed Delaney, he had just one thought, to reach the top of that hill and to make his way to a position of vantage above the hole in the rocks where Corporal Bart Crandall lay, again imagining himself in the throes of the Battle of Belleau Wood, fighting as he had fought through the long days of June, 1918, when the tide of war turned and victory began to hover nearer and nearer to the Allies. There was sympathy in the heart of Sergeant Ed Delaney, sympathy for his buddy of the Marine Corps—yet there was also the knowledge that he was dealing with a man who had brooded himself into a state of mind nearly touching on insanity, a man armed with round after round of rifle ammunition, with gun and bayonet, and behind it all a desperation born of a condition bordering on madness.

Carefully, ever carefully, Sergeant Ed Delaney made his way, pulling himself along by his elbows, taking advantage of

every gully, ever rock, every covering. Before him showed the light of a small clearing, and the waving fronds of the tremendous, waist-high sword ferns which grew there. And toward them he wriggled, an inch at a time, watching, listening—

From far below came the sound of a rough, guttural voice, shouting something in German. Immediately there answered the spitting crack of a rifle as a clip of cartridges was fired in rapid succession, then silence, then the crackling of the gun again. Delaney raised himself on his hands and listened intently.

"In that old dressing-station where Doc Hook hung out!" he muttered to himself as he suddenly veered in his course. "There's a rocky ledge just above it. Luck's with me—"

He had reached the ferns now, and the going was easier. The constant waving and tossing of the fronds concealed his movements, and he was able to crawl on his hands and knees without fear of detection. Again from below had come the sound of a German sentence, as though shouted in derision, and the snapping bark of the rifle as it answered. Then a shrieking, mad voice echoed over the hills and through the scraggly forest:

"Come on out and show yourself! I'll fight you—I'll fight you!"

But the only answer from the rocky hill below was a derisive guttural laugh, and a curse in German. Sergeant Delaney of the Marines moved faster than ever.

NOW he was only fifty feet away from the ledge of rock which projected over the little dressing-station. A swift rush, then he raised himself quickly and waved his arms, just as the man beneath clattered forth another clip of shots from his rifle. There came a cry from down the hill.

"*Kamerad! Kamerad!*"

But from the dressing-station the voice of Corporal Bart Crandall sounded cold and hard.

"*Kamerad*, eh?" he asked. "Found a hand-grenade, maybe. Or you've got your automatic all ready. Show yourself if you want to surrender to me—and keep your hands in the air!"

Delaney had crouched, waiting. Now he leaned forward apprehensively. If Mickey Brogan showed himself, it meant death—a second would be enough for Bart Crandall to sight that gun and fire—and

Bart Crandall wore an expert rifleman's medal. Delaney's heart pounded—then he smiled. From down the hill had come a whining voice, pleading with Crandall in German:

"Please — please help me. I'm — wounded."

"Wounded, eh? Thought I got you with that last shot. But—"

"Help me—if you're a man, help me!"

There was a moment of silence, while Delaney, crouching on the top of the rock, waited like some wild animal, ready for the spring. A moment, two, then three. Vaguely he could hear the man mumbling something to himself. Once he saw the tip end of a rifle come forth, its bayonet projecting savagely before it, aim down the hill—then lower again, as though the man behind it had changed his mind. At last, a scraping sound against the rocks, and Delaney tensed more than ever. His game had been stalked, and it was coming out, into the open!

Once more Mickey Brogan, the decoy, groaned and called for help. Once more the rifle was raised and lowered. Then Ed Delaney, crouched for the spring, saw the tip of a steel helmet as it projected ever so slightly from beneath the rocky ledge, moved slightly, and then began to come forward. Slowly the full helmet appeared, then the shoulders of a man, as he carefully raised himself and looked down the hill. But from the position occupied by Mickey Brogan came only that whine and that appeal:

"Help me—help me!"

THE cry found its mark. The man beneath Delaney hesitated only a moment—then he stepped forth from his protection. And as he did so, the form of Ed Delaney rose, his arms extended, and he shot out into the air, straight down upon the back of the man below him, and with a crashing impact, knocked him from his footing, and sent his rifle clattering far beneath.

A scream shrilled through the Forest of Belleau, a scream like that of a trapped animal. Savagely Bart Crandall turned and twisted as the two rolled down the hill, but the hold of Ed Delaney did not break. Again the scream, and again, while the fists of the shell-shocked man beat against his assailant, pounding against his face and head, in vain.

From his position in hiding, Mickey

Brogan ran forth and leaped into the struggle. Wildly the three men clattered about through the underbrush and the deadened branches of shrapnel-torn trees, the prisoner kicking and snarling and clawing and writhing, the two Marines endeavoring with all their strength to hold him, to—

"Get him quick—grab him!" It was the sudden voice of Ed Delaney. "He's breaking my hold, he's breaking my hold, he's breaking—"

But too late. Bart Crandall had lowered his head and set his every muscle, then, cramping his chest, had caused Delaney's hands to slip for just a moment. A sudden twist followed, a full expansion of the Marine's chest, and Delaney's hold had broken.

In an instant Bart Crandall was on his feet facing the two Marines. His eyes were wild and reddened, his teeth curled from his lips.

"Tried to croak me, eh?" he shouted. "But you can't do it!"

He bent suddenly, and when he rose, the rusty, broken barrel of a rifle was in his hand—the rifle of a Marine long dead, torn from him by a boche bullet, to lie and rust until it should be raised against the men of his own Corps. Madness was in Bart Crandall's eyes. He swung the heavy piece of steel and leaped forward.

BUT as he sprang, the two Marines before him moved just as quickly. Far to one side went Mickey Brogan, while the form of Ed Delaney had dodged, ducked, then dived straight at the knees of the shell-shocked Marine.

It was as though Crandall had tripped over a rope stretched in his path. He seemed to rise in the air, hesitate, then plunge forward with more speed than ever, straight over a ledge of jutting rock—then downward. Ten feet below, he crashed, his helmet and equipment banging, his hands clawing for an instant, then sagging nervelessly into inanimation. Hurriedly Delaney and Mickey Brogan made their way to his side. Silently the sergeant cut the strap which held his steel helmet, and pulled it from his head.

"We're lucky if he aint dead," said Delaney slowly.

"We're lucky, then," answered Mickey Brogan, bending over the unconscious man, his ear to his heart. "His pump's working."

"Good enough." Delaney opened the lids of the man's eyes. "Either concussion or a fracture of the skull," came his worried verdict. "Here's hoping that tin hat saved him."

Then they raised their brother of the Corps, silently and tenderly, and began their slow egress from the evil Forest of Belleau.

TWO days later Sergeant Ed Delaney and Corporal Mickey Brogan again stood in the office of the Chief Paymaster at Paris. They were facing the major, very stiffly at attention, and the major was smiling as he talked.

"I thought you men would like to know about Corporal Crandall," the kindly-faced man was saying. "I've just heard from the hospital. He's going to be all right."

"It wasn't a fracture then?"

"No." And the major smiled again. "Just enough of a concussion to pull him out of his rut. A couple of months of rest will put him back on the job again, as good as ever. And by the way, in regard to that matter of the medal you talked about—everything's lovely. He'll get it."

"Gosh! I'm glad of that, sir." Delaney was grinning. "But, sir,—if the major will let me say it,—about that other Crandall, sir, he's got the reputation of being a good man, sir, and—"

But the major was smiling again.

"I wouldn't worry if I were you," he said genially. "G. H. Q. looked the matter up. They found two recommendations for a man named Corporal Bart Crandall. Naturally they had thought they were both the same man, and made one D. S. C. do the job. But they've straightened things out now—and things are lucky all the way around."

"We're very thankful, sir."

They did an about-face and were almost at the door when the voice of the major pulled them back.

"By the way," he said with a little twinkle in his eye, "you two men wouldn't object if I wrote a letter to the Major Commandant with the request that it go on your military records?"

Wide grins simultaneously hit the faces of Sergeant Delaney and the bald Mickey Brogan. Simultaneously they answered:

"Not a-tall, sir! Oh, no indeed, sir! Not a-tall!"

"THE GREAT LOUDWATER MYSTERY"

THIS magazine has won for itself a distinctive place in the minds of thousands of Americans who like stories of mystery, and no better story of the sort has ever appeared in its pages than the one by Edgar Jepson which begins in the next issue.

From the instant Lord Loudwater is found killed in his own library until the last paragraph is reached the interest of the reader is held tense and unswerving. The crime startled all England and the best brains of Scotland Yard were perplexed until the end, when— But *that's* the story. It will continue through three issues of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE beginning with the next, that for August, on sale everywhere July first.

Three Thousand Dollars



THE story of a thief who wouldn't send a crooked mayor to prison — he was afraid the mayor would teach the other convicts politics.

By J. E. Hasty

THERE is no such thing as a trivial happening. A casual word, an insignificant event of the morning, may develop momentous, complex consequences before nightfall. The law of cause and effect continually disregards proportions. A spider-web saved the life of a Scotch king; the squawk of a goose deferred the fall of Rome for some hundreds of years. Because Thaddeus Keets, alias "Slim" Keets, alias "the Alley Rat," lost his cap, the fair name of the city of Centralia was preserved, although it must be admitted that certain prominent citizens of Centralia spent a most uncomfortable half-hour during the process, to say nothing of the intrigues, graft, bribery, theft, blackmail and even threats of violence that were involved.

Hurrying from work one night, Slim Keets lost his cap. A detective found the cap in an alley on the following morning. It was recognized at two saloons and a secondhand clothing store as belonging to Slim. Then it was that Thaddeus Keets, alias "Slim" Keets, alias "the Alley Rat," modestly, quietly, unostentatiously took his departure from Chicago.

His stop at Centralia was entirely unpremeditated. Prior to the arrival of a certain southbound freight-train, Centralia, for Slim Keets, did not exist. Yet he might have gone farther and fared worse. Centralia was quite a little metropolis. At the semi-monthly luncheon of the Centralia Booster Club it was constantly referred to as "the coming city of the Middle West." At the time of Slim's arrival there, it was

still on its way. Certainly Centralia had not stood still during the past decade. The Centralia Chamber of Commerce had moved twice in the last three years, each time into larger and more commodious quarters; the Centralia Federation of Women's Clubs had long since settled the matter of birth-control; and the Chicago papers had devoted an entire half-column to the Centralia Canning Company strike of February last. As Frederick Mason, owner and general manager of the Bon Ton Stores, said at one of the Booster luncheons: "Gentlemen, Centralia does not claim to be as large as some of her neighbors; but without the shadow of a doubt, our city has advanced as rapidly, if not more so, than any city, irrespective of size, in the Middle West." (Applause.) "We are, as it were, a smaller edition of Chicago, a miniature of New York." But I digress.

SLIM KEETS surveyed Centralia from the top of a box-car; and then, because he found it good, or because circumstances provided no alternative, he crawled to the end of the car and clambered to the ground. Ten minutes later he was making his way up Main Street. Dressed in a blue-serge suit, slightly wrinkled but otherwise in good condition, and a cloth cap, he might easily have passed for a young mechanic or clerk hurrying home to a late supper. Swinging up Main Street, he turned south down Jackson Boulevard. It was quite

dark by this time, and he paused in the shadow of a rather pretentious brick building to take inventory. Besides his hand, his pockets contained forty cents in real money and a pawn-ticket. The latter was useless; the money would provide him with supper and possibly a bed. After that his welfare depended upon his hands.

Now mark how circumstances of no importance, when taken singly, combine to shape the destiny of man: (1) Jackson Boulevard is a side-street, none too well lighted, and at this particular hour usually deserted; (2) directly over Slim's head hung the loose end of a fire-escape; (3) there was a train out of Centralia at ten-five that night. The conclusion flashed into Slim's mind almost simultaneously with the premises. He could pull off a job and beat it out of town hours before the trick was discovered. In his own piquant vernacular, it was a pipe. He glanced cautiously around, swung himself up and ascended the iron ladder. Where the fire-escape passed a partly opened window he paused, reached over and gently raised the window another six inches. Then he was on the inside, peering out, making sure that no one on the street below had observed his unusual entrance. Jackson Boulevard was still deserted. There was no one about, except of course, Slim's guardian angel.

Slim's plans always included his guardian angel—only he spoke of that celestial protector as "luck." What the present plan did not include, however, was that some one should enter the room from an adjoining office almost before he had slipped away from the window. The turning of a door-knob warned him just in time. He stepped noiselessly to the right. There was the click of a switch; the room was flooded with light—and Slim Keets found himself securely hidden behind a screen set crosswise to the corner of the room. He had blundered behind it in the dark. The guardian angel was on the job.

IT occurs to me as I write what an easy job the dramatist has compared to the short-story writer. In this instance, where I must plunge into a more or less lengthy description of a character, the dramatist would merely have to say: "Enter the Mayor;" the lights flash on; the door opens; and he is there, two hundred and thirty pounds of him, pink-complexioned, clear-eyed, suave, with visible evidence of

good living under his snug white waistcoat, a self-made man well satisfied with his creator, yet withal not lacking ambition. As he remarked to Miss Ross, his stenographer, upon more than one occasion: "Every day brings a certain number of opportunities. If you don't grab 'em off, somebody else will, and you can't blame a man for looking out for himself." To which Miss Ross, without lifting her eyes, would murmur: "Yes, Mr. Dorgan."

She was a quiet, mouselike sort of girl, whose cheeks were innocent of rouge, and who, contrary to the general opinion regarding stenographers, did not chew gum incessantly. She was pretty in a plain sort of way, with an air of meekness (also contrary to the g. o. *in re* stenographers) which at first used to puzzle the mayor of Centralia, who had never heard that some day the meek will inherit the earth. However, if he had regarded this somewhat unusual trait with suspicion, time had removed it. What if she was a bit stupid, he argued. So much the better! She was capable enough, and was not one to work with an eye on the office clock for fear of putting in a few moments overtime. And that is—come to think of it—the reason she was still at work in the outer office on that summer's evening when occurred what did occur.

It began with Mr. Mason's expressing his views regarding the Red Light Abatement Ordinance which at that time lay unsigned in the Mayor's desk. Seated opposite the Mayor in the latter's private office, he explained that in his estimation the measure would scarcely be as beneficial as one might at first suppose. As president of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and having the welfare of the city at heart, he would advise waiting a few years before adopting so radical a measure.

"But Mason," the Mayor interrupted, "I should imagine that if anyone favored the abatement ordinance, it would be you. As I remember it, during my campaign last fall you severely censored me for allowing an eyesore like the Centralia Flats district to exist."

"So I did; but at that time I didn't think—that is, I see the matter now in a different light. You understand—"

"I assure you I don't understand. Suppose you quit beating around the bush and come to the point. You have a specific reason for not wanting the measure to go through. What is it?"

Mason stirred uneasily in his chair. "Well, confidentially, Your Honor, I—I own considerable property in the Flats district; and if the measure passed, I'd—"

"Lose your tenants, eh?"

"Well—yes. Just at present the destruction of that source of income would work somewhat of a hardship upon me. In fact, I could even afford to forfeit a reasonable sum if the measure was vetoed."

"H'm-m! Is this an offer to bribe me?"

"No—no, not at all. I merely mentioned the fact that I could afford to forfeit a sum if the ordinance was not passed—quite a tidy little sum, at that; I should say something like three thousand dollars. I mention that amount simply because I have it with me in cash."

"I see." The Mayor rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Of course, I haven't made up my mind concerning the measure one way or the other. Still, any sum of money coming from you might be regarded by some as evidence of something crooked."

"Oh, there'd be absolutely nothing illegal about this," Mason assured him. "It's a matter of business, pure and simple. Besides, I haven't offered you any money, and I'm not going to. However, if you should open the top drawer of your desk and find an envelope containing three thousand dollars—"

"I wouldn't know how it got there?"

"Exactly."

THE MAYOR arose, and hands thrust deep in his trouser pockets, walked over to the window, out of which he gazed long and thoughtfully. Presently Mason joined him. Some moments later, when Miss Ross entered with a sheaf of papers, they were both lost in silent contemplation of the city beneath them. Miss Ross left the room noiselessly.

The Mayor was first to break the silence. "A great little burg!" he breathed.

"The coming city of the Middle West," Mason added.

Back at the desk, he picked up his hat. "Well, Your Honor, I'll be running along now, if you'll oblige me by signing this. It's a statement of your reasons for vetoing the measure, which I promised to secure for the editor of *The Morning Courier*.—Ah! Thank you. Good night."

"Good night," the Mayor responded.

He had pulled open the desk drawer before Mason had reached the door. Now he swung around quickly in his chair. "One

moment, Mason," he called sharply. "There seems to be some mistake here."

"What's the matter?" Mason asked.

"Isn't the money all there?"

"There isn't any of it here."

"Why—why, it must be."

"Well, it isn't—see for yourself." By way of proof, the Mayor pulled out the drawer and spread its contents on the desk before him. The envelope was not among them.

"I—I can't understand it," Mason gasped. "I placed it there scarcely a moment ago."

"So you say. At any rate it's not here now."

"Are you quite sure you didn't remove it."

"Certainly I didn't remove it."

"So you say."

The Mayor was rapidly losing his grasp on his temper. "Look here," he exclaimed angrily, "are you insinuating that I'm trying to double-cross you? What do you think I am, a crook?"

"What I think has nothing to do with it," was Mason's cool reply. "I put the money in the drawer. If it isn't there now, that's not my business. Good evening."

He started toward the door. Before he reached it, however, the Mayor barred his way. "No, you don't," he warned. "You can't pull that kind of a kid trick on me and get away with it. I wasn't born yesterday. What kind of a little game are you trying to play?"

"I tell you, I put the money in the drawer. I remember it distinctly. Just as your stenographer—That's it. Your stenographer! She's stolen it!"

The Mayor was not impressed. "My stenographer is honest," he said. "Besides, how would she know that the envelope contained money?"

"But she has taken it," Mason explained excitedly. "She came into the room just after I put the money in the envelope. She saw me drop the envelope in the drawer. Why, it's as plain as day. Of course she's got it."

"I don't know whether you're stalling or not, Mason," the Mayor retorted, "but I'll soon find out."

HE touched a button at the edge of his desk, and a buzzer whirled faintly in the outer office. A moment later Miss Ross entered. Evidently on the point of

leaving, she wore her hat and was buttoning her jacket as she came through the door.

"Miss Ross," the Mayor began, "I've mislaid an envelope containing—containing some papers. You didn't accidentally pick it up, did you?"

"Why—why, no, Mr. Dorgan."

"Saw nothing of it at all?"

"No sir."

Mason was not at all satisfied. "See here," he snapped. "I want the truth. Answer me: didn't you take an envelope out of that drawer?"

"No sir," Miss Ross answered hotly, "I said I don't know anything about the mon—"

Realizing her slip, she broke off abruptly, but not abruptly enough. The Mayor caught up the word: "Money? How do you know the envelope contained money?"

"Why—why, I just imagined—I thought the envelope had money in it. I didn't—"

The Mayor silenced her with a wave of his hand, and a cold: "That will do, Miss Ross. You will please return it."

"But I haven't got it," she protested piteously. "I haven't got it."

"We'll see," the Mayor said grimly. "Please sit down." He picked up the desk phone. "Local, Department B," he told the operator. "Hello, is that you, Sergeant? This is the Mayor. Say, Sergeant, is Kennedy still on duty? He is? Well, send him up. . . . Yes, to my office. Thank you."

AN interval of silence followed, during which the Mayor slowly paced the floor. Once he paused in front of Miss Ross' chair as if he intended to say something to her, but she was crying softly into her handkerchief, and so he passed on. Mason sat nervously drumming his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Er—Mr. Dorgan," he observed restively, "perhaps we'd better let the whole matter drop. I can't afford to be mixed up with the police."

"It'll be all right," the Mayor answered. "Kennedy is a friend of mine. We can trust him."

He paused at the sound of a door opening. Mason turned and saw a large, red-faced, square-jawed individual in civilian clothes filling the doorway.

"Evening, Your Honor," the newcomer said, removing his derby hat and glancing quickly around the room. "What's the row?"

"An envelope containing some papers has disappeared," the Mayor explained, "and we have reason to believe that it has been stolen."

"Where was the envelope when you saw it last?"

"In the drawer of my desk—at least that's the place where Mason says he put it."

"Of course I put it in the drawer!" Mason exclaimed impatiently. "You're only wasting time with these questions. We know who stole the envelope." He pointed an accusing finger at Miss Ross. "There's the thief."

"Well, what have you got to say about it?" the detective asked her.

"N-nothing," she sobbed.

"Come on—you might as well kick in with that envelope."

"I have—I haven't—" Her voice, husky with crying, broke before she finished the denial.

"We'll see about that," Kennedy sneered. "I'll just phone down to the police matron and have you searched."

He picked up the desk phone, his back toward her. It was her last opportunity to get rid of the long manila envelope concealed beneath her jacket. On the pretence of picking up her tear-dampened handkerchief, she bent over in her chair, concealing her movements behind the desk. It was but the work of an instant to twitch the envelope from its hiding-place and drop it onto the floor, where a sly movement of the foot could push it unnoticed beneath the desk. Her fingers had scarcely touched the envelope, however, when her wrist was encircled by the viselike grip of Kennedy's hand.

"I thought so," he leered, pulling Miss Ross to her feet, the envelope still clutched in her hand. "I thought so. You dames can't fool me with that sob-stuff. I've handled 'em like you before. You're under arrest." He released her, and she sank into the chair, her face buried in her hands. "Well, Your Honor, I guess that about straightens things out. Always glad to help you any time I can."

NOW, permit me to interrupt the chain of my narrative with the brief explanation as to why Mr. Mason took the action I am about to record. There is—so the adage declares—honor among thieves. But we must remember that Mr. Mason and the Mayor of Centralia were

not thieves. They were politicians. Moreover Mr. Mason had in his pocket a statement to the press, signed by the Mayor himself, giving that official's reasons for vetoing the Abatement Ordinance. In three hours it would be in cold type. The Mayor could not then, with any regard to consistency, repudiate it. Hence, Mason saw no reason why he should relinquish his claim upon the purloined envelope, a claim that was as good as the Mayor's, particularly as the latter could not contest it without finding himself in an embarrassing situation. Consequently when Kennedy proffered the envelope to the Mayor, it was Mason who spoke.

"Pardon me, Officer, but the envelope is mine."

"Yours!" the Mayor ejaculated.

"Why, yes."

"You must be crazy! That envelope belongs to me."

"Where did you get it? Didn't I just put it in the drawer?"

"That has nothing to do with it. Give me the envelope, Kennedy."

"Officer, that envelope is mine. I'll hold you responsible for it."

"S-say," stammered the puzzled Kennedy, "what are you two tryin' to do, kid me? What's in here, anyway?"

Before either of them could answer, Miss Ross was on her feet. "I'll tell you what's in it," she cried defiantly. "I'll tell you what's in it—three thousand dollars! Three thousand dollars that Mason slipped to the Mayor for vetoing the Red Light Ordinance! They thought they could put it over on me, make me be the goat, but they're away off. I'm going to make a clean breast of the whole business. I'm goin'—"

"Miss Ross!" the Mayor frantically interrupted. "Miss Ross, you don't realize what you're saying."

"Oh, I know what I'm saying, all right. I've been wise to all your little grafting schemes for a long time. I've just been waiting to get you with the goods, so I could make you come across to me. But anyway, they'll be three of us doin' time when I get through testifyin'."

"My dear young lady," Mason smugly asserted, "your statements are preposterous. Do you imagine that any sane court would believe such a wild fabrication, especially about me, a man whose honesty and integrity has never been questioned, a pillar of the church?"

MISS ROSS had listened to him thus far with a look of scorn on her rather pretty face. Now she turned on him furiously.

"That'll do from you," she cried, her lips curling into a sneer. "If it wasn't for guys like you, there wouldn't be any need of a red light ordinance. I had a sister that worked in one of your stores. She tried to be honest and good—good on four dollars a week! You a pillar of the church! If there's any more pillars of the church like you, the congregation had better look out, because some day the building is going to collapse."

"See here, Officer," Mason appealed to Kennedy, "are you going to stand there and allow her to bring such outrageous charges against His Honor and myself. You'd better lock her up. She's a thief."

"Oh, I don't know," the detective coolly replied. "It looks like there's a couple of crooks here. She seems to have about the right dope on you two birds. The envelope's got money in it, all right." He chuckled to himself. "An envelope containing some papers." Huh! This is rich."

"Yeah, and it will be a whole lot richer when I get on the witness-stand," Miss Ross supplemented.

"Oh, come now," the Mayor began genially, "let's settle this little matter between ourselves—eh, Mason? Suppose we take the money and split it up."

"Split it up," Kennedy echoed in derision. "Split it up! I don't think we'll split it up. This is the most dough I've had my mitts on for some time. I'm going to keep all of it."

"What's the matter with you, Kennedy!" the Mayor exclaimed. "Do you think you can get by with a stunt like that? I'll have you up before a judge inside of twenty-four hours, and Mason will back me up."

"All right!" the detective replied. "You and your little pal Mason go right ahead. I'm going to let your stenographer go. Then if you guys get heavy, I'll run you both up on a bribery charge, and introduce Miss Ross as a witness. She'll have to testify as I say in order to save herself. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

THERE was, in fact, nothing for His Honor to do—nothing but to turn on the surprised, and by this time very frightened, Mason.

"You thought you'd have an easy time, putting the double cross on me. You make me sick. I wouldn't be surprised if this whole business was a scheme to get something on me. For all I know, you've got a dictograph planted, or a confederate listening to all this. Why, for two cents—" With clenched fists he advanced toward Mr. Mason.

"Stop it!" Mason shouted. "Don't you dare!" Panic-stricken, he backed away, tripped over the rung of a chair, staggered backward and fell against a screen that stood in the corner. The screen toppled over. Behind it stood a young man in a blue serge suit and wearing a cloth cap.

"Who in blazes are you?" roared the Mayor.

The young man advanced with a mocking bow. "Me? Why, I'm the gentleman you were just referring to, the fellow who has been listening to all this."

It was Miss Ross who diagnosed the situation with "A frame-up!" And the phrase sent a chill through the three men. Each realized that something had to be done, and done quickly, in order to clear himself. Kennedy made the first move.

"Now that our—my little joke is over, Your Honor," he said with a forced laugh, "I guess I'll be off. Here's your money."

The Mayor gingerly accepted the envelope. "Er—yes," he replied nervously, "yes, we must all have our little jokes, Officer, but the money isn't mine. Don't you remember? You got it from Miss Ross."

"Yes, but the envelope didn't belong to me," Miss Ross answered. "Why, I didn't even know what was in it. Mr. Mason laid it on the table. It must be his."

"Oh, no," Mason protested, "the money isn't mine. If it doesn't belong to either of you people, it must be the Mayor's."

The Mayor faced a dilemma. The others refused the money; to keep it would be incriminating himself. "Well, it isn't mine—that's certain," he declared, tossing the envelope on the desk.

THE intruder smiled at their forced play. "I'm afraid it won't work," he said softly. "Please sit down, all of you."

They obeyed in gloomy, abject silence. Still smiling, the stranger faced them.

"Come, now," he said genially, "don't take this so seriously. I hardly think I'll prefer charges against you. The fact is, I'm a crook myself. I came up the fire-escape and through the window—"

"You did what!"

"Through the window!"

The four were on their feet, but the stranger continued speaking. "Of course, I overheard enough to send you all up, if I take the notion. I'm still keeping school here. Sit down."

The stranger's voice was compelling. They sat.

"I said I was a crook, and I am. But I'm a square crook. I never double-crossed a pal in my life, while you—well, the only reason I'm not running you up, is because I don't believe you're fit to associate with the men in prison. You might teach them politics. No, I'm going to let you go. There's your graft-money; you can go ahead and fight over it." He had picked up the envelope as he spoke; now he tossed it into the half-open drawer with an expression of disgust.

When he spoke again, there was no anger, no contempt in his voice, only pity. They felt it, and lowered their eyes, the first faint stir, perhaps, of a nobler nature within them.

"I came into this room to steal," he went on. "Now I'm glad I had to hide before I had a chance to get away with anything. I'm thankful that I have at least one clean dollar in my pocket." He produced the coin and held it before them. "That dollar is clean, clean as the day it was made. Look at it; maybe you've never seen one like it."

He threw the money upon the desk and walked slowly to the door. The four watched him, shamefaced, silent. The door opened and closed. He was gone.

Instantly their repentance vanished. The Mayor made a dash for the drawer, but Mason beat him to it. Before his fingers closed on the envelope, however, Kennedy intervened.

"Cut that!" he growled. "What I said a minute ago, stands. Hand over that money."

Obeying mechanically, Mason picked up the envelope. "It's gone!" he gasped. "We've been tricked! The money's—the money's gone!"

With an oath Kennedy snatched the envelope from him; but what the detective was about to say will never go on record, for just at that moment Miss Ross began to laugh. She laughed long and loudly and a little hysterically, for she had picked up the clean dollar and tested it with her thumb-nail. It was counterfeit.

Free Lances *in* Diplomacy



IN the grill of the Army and Navy Club five officers—just home from the Rhine Valley—had come to their coffee and cigars after the sort of dinner to which they had been looking forward through many a hellish month; and because three of them were of the clean-living English stock to whom tradition and breeding were very real things in life, they were exerting themselves in the undemonstrative British way to make their two overseas guests thoroughly comfortable.

"Bricky" (otherwise Captain, the Honorable James Creighton Mount-Bemish) was officially the host, though "Toodles" and "Clam" (respectively Major Sir Alan Forbes and Lieutenant Bertie Manners) were fellow-members and could have put a friend up at other clubs as well. "Scrapper," of the —th Canadians, was a man's man of Scotch-Irish-Habitant ancestry, as far as he knew anything about it—a company-commander beloved by men and fellow-officers, a genial soul to whom dukes and navvies were alike, sound at heart and as a fresh-minted sovereign. And the fifth was Muckroyd, "Leftenant Muckroyd," which, to army men, indicates his exact status.

The insignia on his uniform-cuff were not unmerited during the recent argument

with Germany; he was entitled to those worsted insignia by reason of his natural ability in handling men and a most surprising talent for mathematics as applied to trajectories—else they most certainly wouldn't have been there. His father had progressed from day-laborer to contractor, with money in the bank, and his mother from washerwoman to superintendent of a steam-laundry in Winnipeg—which was vastly to their credit. But the litter of children had grown up in an out-of-doors atmosphere modified and circumscribed by labor prejudices against capital of every description. Ideas, unproved theories, distrust of everything appertaining to the so-called "upper classes," had been fed to them with so many mouthfuls of daily food that there was no longer room for argument.

The army is a leveler, as many a man has found out. There are privates, non-coms, officers, high command; but in each stratum, one fish is like another fish, whether his former scales were golden or dirty brown. Muckroyd found, before mounting three chevrons, that the man next to him frequently had a handle to his name in private life. As he won upward to His Majesty's commission, he frequently squatted in puddles of cold muddy water

with viscounts, baronets and other swells who were addressed by old nicknames which proved terms of respect and endearment. And because he unquestionably made good as an officer under various trying forms of "strafig," he found himself accepted in the mess as a matter of course—treated with unvarying courtesy by swells whom he still regarded with inborn suspicion, invited to join them in various forms of relaxation. But he never quite figured out why it happened that no nickname was ever applied to him—why he was invariably "Leftenant Muckroyd" when any of the mess directly addressed him.

DURING a lull in the talk, that evening, Muckroyd was moved to comment upon something which had aroused his ire coming up from the cross-Channel transport.

"Saw something this afternoon which I'd often heard about but never happened to run across before—that time the train was passing those miles of wooded land after the old castle-place on the top of that hill. Fellow in our car was from that part of the country—said all that land was a private estate of some viscount—fifteen hundred acres of it."

"Aye. That'll have been M—'s place, I fancy, from the description. Dev'lish fine estate, too—been in the family since Edward the Third, one branch or another. Those oaks you saw have been there more years than anyone can remember—and others before 'em, back to the Conquest, I fancy."

"Then there must be six or eight hundred acres that have never been under cultivation! And from what you say, even the timber has never been cut or put to any civilized use!"

"All the additions to the Hall for the last four hundred years were built of it—which is rather good an' very lastin' use, I fancy. But of course, if you mean commercial use—well, that'll be another matter again. One doesn't cut down the ancestral oaks on his estate to sell, unless he's beastly hard up. And it's rotten form, even then. As for any other reason—well, it might be hard to give."

"Hard to give! What beastly rot! Nothing personal, Captain—but really that sort of thing is a little too much for a chap brought up in open country where land is used as it ought to be. Why, the

crops that eight hundred acres could produce would keep dozens of families in food the year round! It's economic waste—that's what it is. And that's one of the troubles with this whole country! Perhaps it *is* the finest land on earth, as you English claim—for the swells who hog it all! But the poor devils who starve to death in this big town of yours sing another tune—that we hear across the Atlantic, when the wind is right!"

FOR a moment or two there was a silence so complete that Muckroyd was upon the point of jumping up and stamping out of the club—as they were speculatively wondering if he *would* do. Then some one chuckled good-naturedly and lighted a cigarette.

"One fancies Mr. Muckroyd was hobnobbin' with some of the Bolshevik Johnnies over there before he crossed the Channel—an' has been sittin' up nights to read their propaganda. What? I say, Leftenant, I'm a bit keen on bookin' a wager with you—anything from a quid to a pony. We'll just go down into the East End, the party of us, an' nose about until we find two or three chaps who've not had a proper meal for weeks. There prob'ly are some—though not so many since the war started. An' we'll o' er any of 'em a fifty-acre farm—good, rich land, at the usual rental, payable after he's cashed in on the year's crops, advance him the tin for seed an' implements. My Gov'nor has a farm or two idle this year—no men left to work 'em, an' the women mostly go in for munitions. Couldn't offer much better inducement than that, could we?"

"No. A man would be a fool to refuse—unless there's some string to it! Land-owners don't make offers of that sort, you know."

"They've been makin' 'em for years, in both England an' the eastern United States. An' the point is—your half-starved man in the city slums wont take it up. I've one golden sovereign—twenty-five, if you like—which says he wont! Come, now, Leftenant, that's a sportin' proposition. Take me?"

"I—think—not. In Canada I would—and I'd win. But here—looks to me as if the whole social structure is rotten—something wrong with it! If your starving man wouldn't accept a proposition like that, there's some deeper wrong somewhere."

"I say, Muckroyd, I'm by way of bein' int'rested in your viewpoint. Conceivably you've no intention of bein' offensive. I've lain in shell-holes with you when there was a thousand-foot Hun barrage fallin' betwixt us an' our own trenches, an' I'd say you're honest. Now, for the sake of argum'nt, I take it your idea would be to have every acre of tillable land under cultivation throughout the entire country? Every stand of timber cut an' put to commercial use? No acreage left for purely recreational purposes such as private estates or public parks? Eh?"

"In the main—yes. Of course, there should be public breathing-places, owned by town or state—preferably of rocky land unsuitable for quarrying or for cultivation."

"Aye—an' with trees unsuitable for commercial use, I suppose? What? Of course, you jolly well know that if all the land were under cultivation, as you say, there would be so great a surplus of crops over all possible human need that fully half of them would have to be destroyed each year. An' the timber, if cut without any conservation restrictions, would be completely exhausted within a very limited time. Do you know, by the way, what recently happened to the apple-crop in the New England States? I see you don't. Well, the retail profiteers were not satisfied with a dollar a barrel as their share. They formed one of those bally syndicate things an' bought every apple in New England *on the trees*—then let three quarters of the crop fall an' rot on the ground! I'm told that good apples were only to be had in the cities at threepence each, in consequence. The point is, of course, that overproduction—beyond home an' export use to an extent where the market for any commodity is glutted—is not only sheer waste but makes the raising of it so unprofitable that none will attempt it. Never yet has there been a time when the clearin' an' cultivation of every acre in England has been seriously considered—not even during the overwhelming demands of this war. Even had all the land been available, there were neither men nor women enough to work it. If ye say you're thinkin' of hanging every profiteerin' speculator in foods an' necessities, I'll go all the way with ye—an' pull on the rope. But you'll find 'em among the middle an' lower classes—not the landownin' aristocracy!"

MOUNT-BEMISH had been listening intently to the discussion—and watching his somewhat unpleasant guest. To him the man was more than one of the proletariat, out of his class for the moment—he was something menacing to that civilization which England and kindred nations have so painstakingly wrought through long centuries of upward struggle. Not yet anarchist or Bolshevik, but material from which ignorance and prejudice breed such abortions. After some moments, the Honorable Jim's train of thought crystallized into realization of a duty to his flag and his breed which might be performed—at much inconvenience to his family and himself, yet a clearly indicated duty none the less. So he presently cut into the talk—diffidently, but with the courtesy which was part of him.

"I say, old chap! You've a week or two of leave before your transport sails—why not run down an' spend a few days with us in Cornwall? Eh? Toodles an' Clam will be there. The Mater an' my sisters will be keen on havin' another chap from our mess—an' the Gov'nor is one of the right sort. You're quite sure to like him. Y'see, you've been formin' some of your ideas by hearsay—or possibly from books which may have been a bit hastily written, without proper time for verification. Come along down to us—tramp about the country an' chat with the farmer-folk by yourself. Discuss your ideas with anyone you please—you'll get a fair hearin'. The Gov'nor himself isn't half bad when it comes to argum'nt—as long as one isn't too personal."

It was the first time anyone had addressed Muckroyd as "old chap" since he crossed the water. The little familiarity pleased him—but not with the reaction one usually feels at unmistakable kindness. He took it as evidence that he had compelled them to acknowledge him as their equal. After all, there was no reason why he shouldn't accept the invitation. He was confident of being able to hold his own with any bunch of swells.

THE young officers had been so engrossed in their discussion that they failed to notice the interest it seemed to have for two men at a neighboring table—one a fellow-member noted for his radical ideas, and the other a guest whom a close observer would have pronounced a Russian from the Ukraine, though his cos-

mopolitan manner and perfect English made his nationality doubtful. A glance of mutual understanding passed between them, the outcome of which was a general introduction of the Russian when both parties rose from their tables to leave the club. Apparently, there was no intention in the pairing-off by which Muckroyd and Salankoff found themselves walking up the street together—or the casual suggestion of Salankoff's which brought them, later, to the house of a mutual friend in Stepney, where they met an Irish labor delegate from Idaho, a Socialist agitator from Birmingham and two other Russians. After some general talk, Salankoff remarked upon Muckroyd's point of view which had attracted his attention in the club grill.

"You certainly gave those swells what for, Leftenant—I was delighted with the way you went at 'em! And you were absolutely right—oh, no question about it! Now they'll get you down at one of their swell country estates and feed you soothing sirup until you fancy you've misjudged 'em—think there's a lot to be said for their side. You'll want to watch out for influence of that sort, keep your mind clear on the fact that thousands of those titled snobs have in their possession cold millions which they never earned, millions handed down to them for generations, while countless men and women just as good as they lack the bare necessities of life. When you're shooting pheasants, or whatever it is they hunt on their private estates, don't overlook the miles and miles you're tramping over ground absolutely owned by one idle man who lets it go to waste just for his own selfish pleasure! Your stay in a place like that will be an eye-opener—if you keep your head and don't let them pull the wool over it. When you leave them, come and see us. We'll show you the nippers with which all that sort of thing is going to be crushed out presently—show you how the man who is now starving may sit back in his own motorcar and count his good yellow coin in stacks of thousands!"

NEXT afternoon Muckroyd was met at the Padstow station with a touring-car which took him over to the Earl of Carlow's estate on the cliffs, not far from Trevoze Head—the old manor-house overlooking the ocean. Captain Mount-Bemish met him at the door and led the way up to a room in the south wing from

which there was an extended view of the nearest fields and moor, the cliffs, and the water. With the promise of sending a man up to lay out his dinner-things, the Captain was just going out when he thought to save his guest possible embarrassment by mentioning that his "Gov'nor's" name was Carlow—not Mount-Bemish, like his own. This struck the Winnipeg man as a rather decent thing to do, but didn't produce the intended effect, because in all his twenty-five years the young man had never rubbed elbows with the peerage on its own ground and was as ignorant of its customs as a mongrel puppy. One may know that some of the men in his mess are lords, viscounts and the like, but never have occasion to address them as such in the army.

Like most men who have pushed forward a bit on their road in spite of obstacles, Muckroyd was self-assertive—that being his idea of maintaining equality with those around him. He was inclined to resent a hint from the Captain's valet that he should find a Miss Hemingway in the drawing-room and take her in to dinner, as his hostess had arranged—but he saw that he might have found himself in a foolish predicament without it. The whole thing to him was "flapdoodle," "putting on side;" but these people thought they had to do such things. If he was going to stay with them a few days, it was clearly a case of doing what the others did or being sent to Coventry for insubordination.

Captain Jim had sketched to Lady Helen and his sisters the sort of fellow he was bringing down to them, and the serious reasons which prompted it. So the assigning of Miss Hemingway to the Lieutenant for dinner and placing a lively New York girl on his right were but evidences of forethought in making that sort of man comfortable—both ladies being excellent talkers, and politic as well. Muckroyd fancied himself in excellent form, began to air his socialistic ideas—was considerably surprised by questions from the ladies on either side of him which he couldn't definitely answer without making ridiculous statements. Presently Miss Hemingway suggested putting one of his propositions up to the "Gov'nor" and seeing what he would say to it—using the term thoughtlessly from hearing it so frequently with the Captain and his sisters. Muckroyd hesitated a moment; then mustering his assertiveness, leaned forward until he

caught His Lordship's eye at the head of the table.

"Mr. Carlow, I'd like to ask a question, just to get your opinion on it—" The Earl bowed courteously, and the Lieutenant stated his proposition. He was conscious that everyone else had stopped talking, and that his voice sounded too loud. He tried to modify it, but went on until he finished what he meant to say. Then, after a moment's thought, Lord Carlow stated his views—after which, with a pleasant bow, he turned to the lady on his right, and Miss Hemingway immediately drew her dinner-partner's attention to something else. A few moments later, under cover of the general talk, she whispered to him: "That was *my* fault, Lieutenant—I should have cautioned you against calling him Carlow. He hates it—except from one or two old pals who've known him from infancy."

"Oh, *that* was it, hey? He's the Captain's stepfather, isn't he?"

"Stepfather! My word—how very extraordin'ry! Oh-h-h, I see what you mean—the difference in names? What? You see, with us, over here, an earl's title is usually taken from some county or place, don't you know. But his sons and daughters retain the family name, with the prefix 'Honorable.'"

"An *earl*! D'y'e mean to say the old boy—Bricky's father—is really an earl? Why—oh, hang it all, you're laughing at me! I'm not such a fool as you think! What! No joking? Why, Bricky never said a word about it!"

"Naturally. He wouldn't—of course. One doesn't. It's not supposed to be necess'ry. I say, Lieutenant—would you mind very much if I explained some little thing to you, now and then—customs which seem a bit odd to anyone from overseas? They're silly nons'ense, of course; still, one runs across a good bit of 'em in England. If it'll not bore you too much, I'll tell you how this or that usage happened to come about, until people got to doing it naturally."

NOW, at twenty-five, a boy from any part of North America acquires a degree of self-confidence which puzzles him in after years when memory reconstructs the ideas he once had—confidence that he has attained his majority, completed his education, is a man of the world quite able to account for himself in any situation

which may arise. When he has lived three years under such conditions as those in northern France since 1914, he has certainly had more experience in meeting emergencies than ever he will have again if he lives to be a hundred. In spite of all this, however, he is but an infant in the hands of a modern young woman with centuries of breeding behind her, plus a technical education and two years of ambulance-driving back of front-line trenches. The Honorable Flora Hemingway happened to be that sort of a girl.

Without her unrealized tutoring he would have found himself in so many embarrassing positions through total ignorance of any life save that lived by the masses, that he would have cursingly tramped across the moors to the railway station, with his suit-case on his back, inside of the first forty-eight hours. And for the next fifty years or so his hatred of the aristocracy would have been so bitter as to make a rattlesnake of him upon any sociological question.

Thanks to Captain Jim's forethought, however, he was handled so carefully, put so thoroughly at ease in any situation that came up, that it was impossible to maintain his inborn feeling of distrust after the first day. Watch as closely as he might, he failed to discover any effort whatsoever to "talk him over" and change his socialistic views. He was left to do precisely as he pleased with his time. Some of the house-party did one thing, some another. If he wanted to come along or join in, he was accepted like any of the others, as a matter of course. If he preferred riding a fine horse or tramping over the moors by himself, everybody hoped he'd enjoy it—showed a friendly interest in what he had seen on the way.

Muckroyd talked with several of the Earl's farmer-tenants about the unfair division of their labor—whereby His Lordship, who did no work, made more money out of their activities than they themselves; but they merely thought him unusually stupid in failing to understand the conditions. One farmer who had managed to give himself more than the usual amount of schooling asked, in amazement:

"But why shouldn't His Lordship make a bit more out of my rents than I get for myself? He owns the land, doesn't he?"

"That's just the point! He never worked for it. Why should he have so much and you none at all?"

"BECAUSE some of his people, long ago, either worked for it or served the Crown till the land was granted them. An' you're wrong another way—happens, I've a farm of my own, bought with tin I'd put by. I do no work on it mysel', but my tenant does—an' pays me my rental, at the same rate I pay His Lordship. Now, my nipper—he's five this month: suppose I die when he's sixteen or thereabout, an' leave that farm to him? He'd ne'er have worked for a shilling that went to pay for it, ne'er done a stroke of work on the land itself. Yet would ye say he shouldn't own that land, or be justly ownin' the rental from it? Nons'nse, man—nons'nse! Ye cannot justly do away with a man's right to his own property!

"Suppose, as yon bolsheviki are doin' in Russia, that ye divide up the land—parcelin' out so many acres to each man an' sayin' he shall have no more? How long would the land remain that way? The very men who made such a foolish law would be lendin' to this or that chap for seed or implements or fertilizer—an' when he couldna pay what he borrowed, they'd just take a slice of his land to square the debt. In a year or so your careful money-makin' farmer would be holdin' three or four times what he started with. Well, what would he do then? Parcel it out again among the ne'er-dowells until he had no more than he started with? Can ye see him doin' anything of the sort? Ye cannot! It wouldna be human nature. Some men will make money in heaven, or hell, or the top-side of a rain-cloud halfway between. Some men can ne'er close their fist an' hold what's in it; money slips between the fingers till all's gone. Until ye find some way of changin' human nature, ye'd best hold your tongue about a man havin' no right to his own property unless he worked for it with his hands.

"Take, for example, the matter of interest on money. Because His Lordship has rentals comin' in from his land, in cash, he has now an' then a bit of idle money. I get no return from my crops until they're harvested an' sold. Meanwhile I must have the cost of seed, fertilizer, implements—an' my savings are all invested; so I borrow at a shilling or one-and-tuppence in the pound. Why shouldn't I borrow from His Lordship, who'll renew my bill if the crop fails, rather than from some agent in the city who'll make me pay on

the nail whether I can or no? He makes money just by havin' money. I'd do the same with the tenant on my own bit of farm; so would you or any other man! An' when ye say the principle's wrong, you're talkin' against the history of the world from Adam down!"

"But suppose the Earl happened to be the sort who made you pay rents and loans on the nail—whether your crops failed or not—as most landlords do? Evicted you if you didn't pay?"

"There'll be few landlords of that sort in England or the Colonies—because it's no simple matter to obtain good tenants. They'd risk havin' their land idle a long time. A farmer's life is such a beastly everlastin' grind of hard work that your city chap would rather half starve than attempt it; the job isna one for a lazybones. In Ireland, I grant you, there'll be evictions—mainly because the landlords are absentees who must live on their rents, an' care naught about conditions on the land itself. An agent has no bowels—and frequently poor judgment."

MUCKROYD couldn't say that the Earl put himself out in the least to be decent to him; yet he was surprised at the casual friendliness with which His Lordship occasionally discussed a wide variety of subjects, as if there were no difference in their social or financial positions. One morning, after a game of billiards, they strolled into the long Tudor gallery to get the magnificent sea-view from the big leaded window at the end. The walls were hung with family portraits, arms, armor and heraldic banners, and the Lieutenant was subconsciously impressed with them. He asked if they were all family relics.

"Er—why, I fancy so. Aye, there'll be nothing here save portraits of our own lot an' things belongin' to them. A fairly decent crowd, too—as families go. We'd two black sheep—those portraits yonder. One lived on the Continent half his life—an adventurer sellin' his sword to the highest bidder. The other went over to Philip of Spain an' was mixed up in a plot to kill the Queen—in Elizabeth's time. We talk at times of removin' their portraits from the wall; but they were no cowards, at all events, an' I rather fancy keepin' them as a warning for the younger brood. Baron Steven, over yon, was the chap who equipped four hundred of his

men an' rode to the aid of Richmond when he landed. He was killed on Bosworth Field; but Henry Seventh made his son the first Viscount and gave him this place with its nine hundred acres—to increase the original holdings, east of it. A royal gift, you'll say—and possibly not deserved. Yet consider a bit. Baron Steven's four hundred men closed in around the Earl and twice broke the shock of Richard's attack at Bosworth—saving the King's life or freedom, in all probability. This land belonged to the Crown at that time—so it was robbing nobody. One is inclined to fancy the service rendered might have been really worth it in those days. What?"

"And remaining in your Lordship's family, increasing in value with every generation, it has added to your fortune without your personally rendering any service at all for it. That's one of my contentions, you know. You have the money—and because of it you're able to live in idleness without doing anything in return."

"Wait a bit, my young friend. Let us consider that point, if you please. We'll leave my own case out of it, because one must not go into personalities, you know. But take the peerage as a class. We've rotters among us, to be sure—what stratum of society has not! But don't overlook one fact in connection with this war. It has cost the British aristocracy a good forty per cent of its men in casualties—an' we joined the colors inside of the first two months! We led the way, paid the heavy cost, as we've always done. Aside from that, more than half of us are among the hardest-working men in the Empire. We do no work with our hands; we seem idle enough on our own estates over week-ends; but we're handlin' the commercial, financial an' diplomatic affairs of the Empire all the time. Take for example the money you say we do not earn: Well, it's invested in manufacturing works, railways, mines, steamships—practically every sort of enterprise which employs your laboring men. If we withdrew the money to spend entirely upon selfish pleasures, thousands of laborers would be without work. We educate ourselves to manage all sorts of enterprises and run them wisely—expecting our just profit, of course, but none the less providing the employment without which the workingman and his family would starve."

"Why shouldn't the workingman run the enterprises himself, on a profit-sharing basis, without you?"

"Because manual labor is one thing, and management quite another, as the workingman soon finds out when he attempts it. The main point, as he sees it, is to raise the wage-scale all round. Then he begins to make bids to keep his works going. To do that, he must accept orders at a price which competes with other concerns in the same line—who may have two years' stock of material on hand an' be payin' a lower wage-scale. When he finally collects his bills an' figures up the actual cost of production, he finds he has lost money instead of makin' a profit. He goes on a few months or years,—if he can borrow more capital, which is usually impossible,—then goes into bankruptcy. His works are shut down, sold at auction, his workingmen out of employment."

"The point is, of course, that he was totally unfitted to manage a business in the first place. He lacked the knowledge of producing costs; he lacked the credit necessary to borrow capital for economical purchasing—he would not believe that when cost of wages and material is too high, no manufacturer can sell his goods at a profit. He would say—just as you say, Leftenant—that he should justly have for himself an' his children what the employer has for himself and his children. Which is right enough if he's willin' to go at it in the only practical way. In every family—be they peers or laborers—some one must begin at the bottom and build up the family fortune! Let your laborer spend some of his spare hours in study, reading the periodicals of his trade in the free libraries, learning what thrift really means, putting by a penny here, a penny there, giving his employer honest measure for the pay he gets. Before he knows it, there's enough to buy a bit of land—or a few shares in some paying business. If he's been reading an' thinkin' an' planning, an idea will occur to him some night when he can't sleep from figurin' the thing out—an idea which he may turn into Bank of England notes."

"Consider, if you please, the men in the British Peerage to-day who began life as poor lads without a penny to their names! What one has done, another may do. The workingman *should* have what his employer has—in time. But as he is beginning the game a generation or so

later than the employer's ancestor, who made the fortune to leave him, he must work doubly hard if he expects to reach the same point in a single lifetime."

"Your Lordship will admit, I suppose, that there is a leisure class which does *not* manage enterprises—idles through life without doing anything of benefit to the community, spends upon its own extravagant pleasures amounts of money which would keep thousands of families from starvation?"

"One *might* say that they give employment to thousands by their mere spending—which is no more than the literal truth; but that's a poor excuse for the class you mention. I said, remember, that there were rotters in every stratum. An' upon this point I heartily agree with you. We've by no means as large a leisure class now as we had before the war, but we're by way of eliminatin' even the lot which are left. They're parasites—as much of a disgrace to the aristocracy as they would be to the masses. When a man or woman reaches the point of being too fine for any useful occupation, he or she is hopeless—and should be confined in some sort of an institution. Nobody should be above honest work—in fact, none is either a gentleman or lady who considers work degrading."

TO Muckroyd this seemed a most amazing statement, coming from one whom he certainly would have placed within the detested leisure class. It occurred to him that after his usual ride across the moors before breakfast on his favorite horse, the Earl was seldom visible again until afternoon—being presumably in his study—and that he frequently talked there with some of his guests until two or three in the morning. His Lordship had no appearance of a man who seriously occupied himself with anything. Yet he was gone somewhere from Monday until Thursday. The Lieutenant's idea of work, naturally, was something one could be seen doing at any time between eight and six. Anything else came under the head of playing at work. He began to realize, however, that it might be necessary to revise some of his ideas—particularly after a talk with the Honorable Flora. He had described his discussion with the Earl and asked whether he really ever did much of anything, explaining that His Lordship would say nothing whatever about himself.

"Of course not! It's rotten form to brag. On the whole, I'd say he does quite a lot—one way or another. He's chairman on two steamship boards (effected a consolidation of six lines a few weeks ago), is a director and shareholder in three large manufacturing companies, has been a minister in two Cabinets. He was on Bobs' staff in the Boer War, you know—after being in at the relief of Ladysmith. Twice wounded at Modder River. His four sons were fighting in France and Flanders before September, 1914, one, as a private, and three have been killed. You'd never know it from talkin' with him or Lady Helen, would you? They just carry on an' do what centuries of breeding have taught them to do. Aside from his other activities, Carlow personally knows each of his tenants and their families, attends to their leases and the condition of their holdings himself. Aye, one would say he does his bit, I fancy."

THAT evening Muckroyd was obliged to reconsider another prejudice—when the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint motored over from Trevor Hall in South Devon for the week-end. Here were a man and woman whose names had rung through Europe above the roar of battle and stupendous events—Lady Nan's as that of an organizer of the Naval Auxiliary Hydroplane Service which had been one of the chief factors in conquering the submarine, with fifteen subs and various services to the French Government to her credit; and Lord Trevor's as that of one of the world's most daring aviators in addition to his distinguished services as rear admiral. He was now known to be the first aviator who flew across the Bulgarian mountains from the Ægean to Sofia, the dare-devil who had four times escaped from the heart of Germany and Austria with vital information. Yet they joined the house-party at dinner that night as simply as if they were mere country-folk who hadn't stirred from their own land during the entire war.

When His Lordship drew him into a chat on western Canada, however, Muckroyd began to sense the unobtrusive power and fascination in the man. He knew Winnipeg and the surrounding country as if he had lived there for years, mentioned by name two or three men whom the Lieutenant knew as among the most desirable acquaintances in the city. Lady Nan reminded him of a handsome, mischievous

boy in spite of her imminent thirties—too careless and buoyant to do anything really well, he thought, until she beat him at chess in ten moves and ran a full string at billiards before he had a chance to play a stroke. Certainly the last thing in his mind was the possibility of their coming to Portallon House mainly on his account. Yet after he and the rest of the party had retired for the night, the Trevors quietly joined Carlow, Lady Helen and a Baron Lammerford, who had come the day before, in the Earl's study.

"I heard of that discussion between your son and four of his mess-pals in the grill of the Army an' Navy, Carlow. Sir Abdool happened to be dinin' at a near-by table with a member, an' caught most of it—particularly after Muckroyd got to expressin' his opinions in a bit louder tone. That radical boulder Perkins was at the next table with a Russian by name of Salankoff—an' introduced him to the young chaps when they'd finished their dinner. Thing looked a bit pointed to Sir Abdool—for, d'ye see, he'd noticed 'em listenin', same as he'd been doin'. So he strolls out of the club in their wake. Sure enough, Salankoff pairs off with young Muckroyd an' takes him to call upon one of his countrymen in a rather unsavory quarter of Stepney. Later an Irish-American labor-agitator an' a Birmingham Socialist came out of the house after young Muckroyd had left. Not much question as to the sort of crew frequintly meetin' there.

"Whole combination looked so fishy to Sir Abdool that he told us about it an' is havin' Downing Street keep tab on that Stepney house. I looked up Captain Jim before he left town—got at what he knew about Muckroyd an' his reason for havin' him down here. Dev'lish good head on that boy of yours, Carlow! He saw what none of his mess-chums apparently did—that Muckroyd, in the present condition of things, is potentially dangerous; an' he thought he'd best start something to minimize the danger as far as this particular chap is concerned. Now—how much of an impression do you fancy you've made?"

"Hard to say. And yet, the fellow seems to have an underlyin' streak of common sense which is a bit hopeful. He took some handlin'! Aye—Helen an' the girls will assure you of that! Sufficiently ignorant of all our little customs, through no fault of his own, to be flounderin' continually in deep water without in the least

understandin' how he had gotten himself there. The least notice of it by any of us would have sent him packin', with his mind full of curses upon everything we represent. But Flora Hemingway took him in hand. You know what the girl is when she becomes int'rested in anything. As far as young Muckroyd is concerned, I fancy it'll not be easy for the bolshevists to entirely convince him with the rot they take—not after these days here with us. And yet I'm not so sure. The great trouble is, there are millions of him! We can reach so dev'lish few with appeals to reason an' common-sense! One issue of a radical news-sheet with half a million circulation will do more harm than we can remedy in months. If, as you say, this young chap is already sought out by the bolshevist lot, our efforts with him are quite likely to have been wasted!"

"There I cawn't agree with you, old chap. On the contr'y! He'll do a good bit of talkin' when he gets back home overseas—an' he's not likely to forget these days with you! It's even a serious question in my mind as to whether we cannot do a lot of mighty effective work in just the way your son has started with this case. We've proved in all the manufacturin' industries that closer acquaintance between employers an' workingmen, threshin' out costs of production, man to man, with the books open between 'em, is havin' a most amazin' influence. Now, if it is possible to carry out the same idea socially, I fancy we'll score in that direction also. What we have most to fear is the unthinkin', unscrupulous element who are determined to have the money—by out-and-out murder and pillage if there's no easier way. We're dealin' with a wave of insanity—an' it's infectious as any Black Plague of the Middle Ages! Most anyone you ask would say that diplomacy is something international—dealt in by ambassadors an' courts alone. On the contr'y, diplomacy is the science of handlin' men and women, official or civilian, rich or poor, aristocrat or laborer. An' of the lot, the most successful diplomacy in the world to-day is ability to handle the masses. Whether we have it or not remains to be seen!"

MUCKROYD returned to London with a feeling that he wouldn't have missed his experience with British aristocracy for a good deal—it had been so en-

tirely different from all his anticipations when accepting the invitation. Into his pleasant reminiscences, at his hotel that night, there dropped the disturbing personality of Salankoff, the bolshevist—and the Lieutenant noticed for the first time a suggestion of uncleanness about the man. At times, when the object to be gained seemed worth the trouble, Salankoff went through the discomfort of bathing, permitted a barber to spruce him up, put on clean linen. But these occasions were only when he expected to dine at one of the better clubs or present himself at the town house of some aristocrat. At other times he reverted to type. Muckroyd was irritably conscious that his visitor needed a shave and the services of a manicure. In spite of this, however, he was sufficiently interested in the man's theories to accompany him to what appeared to be a deserted mansion on the edge of Hackney Marsh—evidently the former residence of some city magnate before the town grew out that far and mocked it with squalid tenements.

The place was in charge of a slovenly caretaker who rented the upper rooms to lodgers from various parts of eastern Europe—himself living at the rear of the parlor floor. Below-stairs were smoking, billiard and dining rooms which seemed to be used by a somewhat more intelligent though equally dirty class—a few of them nodding to Salankoff as he passed through to a passage in the rear that ended in a flight of steps leading down to a very large subcellar two levels below. It occurred to Muckroyd that if the place were raided, for any reason, the police might not suspect the existence of any space below the coal-cellar under the basement referred to—so well concealed was the door which gave access to the steps.

In the subcellar, around a long table, twenty men were smoking and drinking. Salankoff mentioned, sotto voce, as they sat down, that one man had so much influence in the Manchester labor organizations that he almost controlled them, another had an increasingly big following in the Welsh mining-districts, a third had swayed the minds of Glasgow workingmen toward bolshevism until he could have forced a serious checking of industry at twenty-four hours' notice. In fact, every man of the twenty present was a leader in some locality, with a following that would have staggered the body of British

citizenry had it been suddenly revealed to them.

At the first lull in the talk Salankoff told the others who young Muckroyd was, and of his tirade at the Army and Navy Club, supplementing this with his return, that day, from a visit at one of the big estates. Immediately questions were showered upon the Lieutenant from all around the table. He was asked for particulars of the wasteful, criminal life of the swells on their own ground, descriptions of their idleness and contemptuous disregard of labor rights, of their schemes for grinding more money out of the workingmen.

AS Muckroyd realized what these men were implying, what they expected him to say, he was tongue-tied from sheer amazement. If they had the intelligence to sway masses of workingmen, as they undoubtedly did, they simply *must* have some arguments to use which had grains of common-sense. It wasn't possible, seemingly, that they could wield such influence upon a basis of nothing more substantial than silly lies. His own theories for a general reconstruction of the world had been along legal and orderly lines. Strikes, to be sure, but orderly ones, as far as strikes may be so. Growing labor influence through acts of Parliament, Congress, Legislature—influence based upon actual working conditions as he saw them, not anarchy and chaos. After a moment or two he ventured a protest.

"Really, you know, there's something twisted in the ideas you seem to have! It's not possible that the people I've been staying with are so vastly different from the rest of the swells. There were a lot of others dropping in all the time; as far as I could see, they were all the same!" He went on to describe, in a dead silence, his actual experience of the past ten days—emphasizing the point that every one of his arguments had been listened to with the utmost patience and courtesy, and that no effort whatever had been made to influence or convert him to the capitalistic point of view. They listened to him with a concentration that impressed him as rather sinister, their faces settling into sneering, scowling lines—particularly that of Salankoff, who presently exploded:

"I *told* you they'd pull the wool over your eyes, you young fool! That's why you were asked down there! They let you play with their handsome women in

their silks and jewels and satins, paid for with the life-blood of us workingmen, and they just put you to sleep—chloroformed you! Perhaps they did act and talk as you say—we'll not dispute that. But why—you fool? Why did they fill you up with champagne and rich food until you never thought to ask whose money or labor was paying for it? You tell us of a farmer satisfied with his swell landlord and the way he was treated! I'll show you a thousand who'll curse the very sight of one! 'Twas no farmer you saw, at all—just one of their tools, masquerading, to fill you up with all the lies you'd swallow!"

When he stopped, a Limerick man from the other side of the table growled, with a deadly menace in his tone:

"Ye talk to me, lad, like one that'll have taken money for his way of thinkin'! An' it's a thing the cursed nobs do until it's an old story! I mind two Kerry gossoons who was bought, awhile back—until they went among us tryin' would we consent to arbeethrate with the landlords an' capitalists. We found the money on thim—aye! An' where do ye think thim gossoons is now? Hey? I'll tell ye, f'r yer information. They're four feet undher the sod—rottin'! Now be afther tellin' us—how much were ye paid?"

WHEN a man has gone through long months of such hell as was in France but yesterday, part of the time commanding men, ordinary risk of sudden death, the chance of losing life or limb in a brawl, is so slight a variation in the day's work that it scarcely quickens the pulse. Yet the soldier unconsciously absorbs with his recognition of imminent crises the capacity for prompt dealing with them. Muckroyd had been calmly filling his pipe—and deliberately set match to it before replying. Then, looking the Limerick man in the eye until his glance wavered:

"You lie! Aye—look me in the face an' repeat what you said, if you've nerve enough! I'd go to the mat with you damned quick, for less than that, if you were worth it—but you're not. I've better use for my fists than skinning 'em on cowards! Now, look here—the rest of you! I'm a Socialist. I believe in a more even distribution of wealth and profit-sharing, a lot of things no capitalist will agree to—yet. But I know, approximately, what the world's population is, and about the percentage that are level-headed. I'll work

until I drop, for a better readjustment of living conditions, but I'm not fool enough to think I can blow the whole world to hell and keep on living, with money I've grabbed, long enough to enjoy it!

"Now, if you've any idea of getting me interested to the point of joining you, just explain what you're trying to do and how you mean to go at it. In the first place, I understand from Salankoff that the men around this table have influence enough in the labor associations to call a general strike almost any time? Is that right?"

"Aye, we may call a strike whenever it suits us—as a starter!"

"And then what? How long can you keep the men out? No sense in starting anything you can't finish. You must have organization—we'll assume you have that. What's a dev'lish sight more important, you must have money—not a few hundred pounds, but thousands! Enough to keep the men and their families from suffering, going hungry, for months! Where—and how—will you get it?"

Some of the men chuckled—and one pointed back toward the passage leading from the stairs.

"Ye'll have no cause to be uneasy about the money, lad—we've gobs of it! There'll be one comin' down the steps to us now, who'll see to that end of it—aye, an' find the guns too, when they're needed!"

MUCKROYD now saw more than a grain of truth in the Earl of Carlow's statement that the dividing line between socialism and anarchy—in their tangible working out—was so very thin that millions of people would drift across before they knew where they were. He began to realize that he was in the company of out-and-out reds—who probably intended to stop at nothing. But he coolly decided to drift along with them for a while and get at their definite plans.

He studied the man who joined them, with absorbing interest. There was something curiously familiar about certain unconscious movements, and tones in his voice, but to the best of the Lieutenant's knowledge, they had never met before. Evidently this meeting of leaders from every corner of the British Isles had been, primarily, for the purpose of financing them and discussing plans for a strenuous campaign. Svenstrom—the man certainly spoke like a Swede and had the manner of one—got down to business immediately.

From a portmanteau he drew packages of Swedish, Danish, French and English bank-notes of large denomination. There would be no difficulty in depositing them to credit of bearer in any local bank—and nothing by which their source could be traced with any certainty. If the bills in each bundle were all of the same denomination, the Lieutenant estimated that upwards of fifty thousand pounds changed hands in that cellar before his eyes—and that the amount would be forthcoming, many times over, if needed. The big secret organization represented by the men around that table was evidently playing for high stakes—and with what seemed to him a deadly assurance of winning.

Eventually the meeting broke up, and Muckroyd returned to his hotel, accompanied part of the way by Salankoff, who enlightened him further concerning the ramifications of the organization—after securing his promise to attend some of the mass-meetings before his transport sailed.

THE sailing-date had been fixed for the twenty-fifth—and the transport left on schedule, but Muckroyd was not on her. At the last moment he received orders from military headquarters, keeping him in London on waiting detail indefinitely. When he told Salankoff of this, the Russian grinned.

"We wanted you to stay with us long enough to get some of the capitalistic ideas out of your system. The swells had their chance with you; we're but taking ours. With your acquaintance among the labor element in Canada, we think you'll be able to do a good bit for us over there—for which you'll be better paid, my lad, than if you had a fat political job under the Government. Didn't think we had any influence with the military authorities, did you? Just a little matter of preferring charges which you'll be able to clear up with the assistance of your friends among the nobs—but it'll keep you here several weeks, and by that time you'll have a better idea of what capitalistic grinding really is."

At the first mass-meeting, where a number of labor-agitators belonging to various organizations were pointed out to him, Muckroyd got the impression that Salankoff and his crowd were not having things quite so much their own way as they expected. Three of them addressed the meeting with a line of talk which practically

ridiculed the idea of strike after strike for higher wages when they had the power in their own hands simply to take over from the wealthy class every penny they possessed, every acre of land and divide it among the masses. It was almost as outspoken as that—and there was no question as to its effect upon the younger, more unscrupulous element. But in each case one or two men got up from the audience calmly, with convincing logic, to riddle every one of the bolshevist arguments. Apparently they were laborers like the others, but there was no question as to their being thinkers with a positive genius for getting cold facts across into the dull wits of illiterate workmen. And the more passionately excited the bolshevists got, as they ranted up and down the platform, the easier it seemed for these unknown men to make them ridiculous.

To his own surprise Muckroyd found himself siding with them—recognizing the basic truth of every argument they made. Then it occurred to him that the company he was in had begun to grow exceedingly distasteful. When a man shaves every day in the trenches, merely as a matter of morale, and welcomes devoutly the bathing and clean linen each time he goes off duty, he acquires a positive repulsion for shiftless dirty humans with no pride in their personal appearance, and a preference for talking anarchy over work of any sort.

For Muckroyd his English experiences and his socialistic ideas culminated unexpectedly at a Cardiff mass-meeting where a handsome boyish miner—apparently in his twenties—got up to answer a few of the statements which Salankoff had been explosively making after a whispered consultation with the Swedish financial agent Svenstrom, who sat at the back of the platform.

There was something oddly familiar about the young miner, as if they had recently met and talked with each other. The miner challenged Salankoff's statements, defied him to prove a single word he had said and then picked his talk to pieces so convincingly that every miner in the Hall shouted his appreciation of the points made. While trying to place him, some movement of Svenstrom's attracted Muckroyd's attention, and he turned around to look at the Swede. His lips were drawn back in a snarl of hate; the whole unconscious expression of his face had changed to one which the Lieutenant

recognized instantly. He had been a prisoner in Germany for three frightful months before making his escape—tortured, day after day, by a brutal major, the Count von Schwartzberg, whose evident intention was to maim him for life before he got through. And Svenstrom was von Schwartzberg—without a shadow of doubt! And he was financing with huge sums a bolshevik movement to make Britain a bloody shambles within a few weeks. Why, then, if that were really the case— If Germany could throw the Allied countries into chaos while apparently beaten to a standstill herself—why, *she'd win, at the wind-up! Germany would control the world!*

AFTERWARD Muckroyd had no conscious recollection of his subsequent actions that night. The moment the young miner had finished, Salankoff jumped to the front of the platform with a stream of vituperation, accusing him of being a paid agent of the capitalists, sent there to argue away the truth like a barrister in court. But in the midst of his tirade Muckroyd shoved him aside and dragged Svenstrom forward by the coat-collar, holding one elbow in a grip that left the scoundrel limp.

"Men! That young fellow was dead right in every word he said, but he doesn't know some of the inside facts that I do. I've been traveling with Salankoff and his gang because I believed that some of the ideas in bolshevism were right. I've been amazed at the amount of money Salankoff had to keep them going. Three weeks ago I saw this hound give him and twenty other bolsheviks fifty thousand pounds! I saw him do it, mind you—and know what the amount was! Eighteen months ago I was a prisoner in Germany; this bloody bouncer was the major in charge who did his damndest to cripple me for life—would have done it if I hadn't escaped! I know him for the Count von Schwartzberg. Now, what does it mean when a German count pays fifty thousand pounds to men who address meetings all over Britain and tell you to turn bloody anarchists, as Salankoff has just been doing? *Do you get me?*"

He threw the brute down among them—the brute was dead in less than three minutes. Then the Russian slipped up behind Muckroyd and shoved a knife deep

into his side. And his world faded out in blackness.

When Muckroyd recovered consciousness sufficiently to separate ugly painful dreams from reality, he was in a lovely old room with oak paneling and tapestried walls, the windows of which looked over the Scabbacombe cliffs in South Devon, across the Channel. And presently his eyes turned slowly to the smiling, mischievous face of a woman who looked like a handsome boy—a woman known around the world as Nan, Countess of Dyvnaint. For several moments they looked at each other across the foot of the bed—with mutual satisfaction. Then he grinned and said—very slowly:

"Salankoff said—a paid agent—of the—capitalists?"

"Salankoff—lied. I've worked harder every month of my life than he ever did in a year! And I know the workingman's life better than he would ever have known it. The main point is: did my arguments sound reasonable—as if they might "be true—or not?"

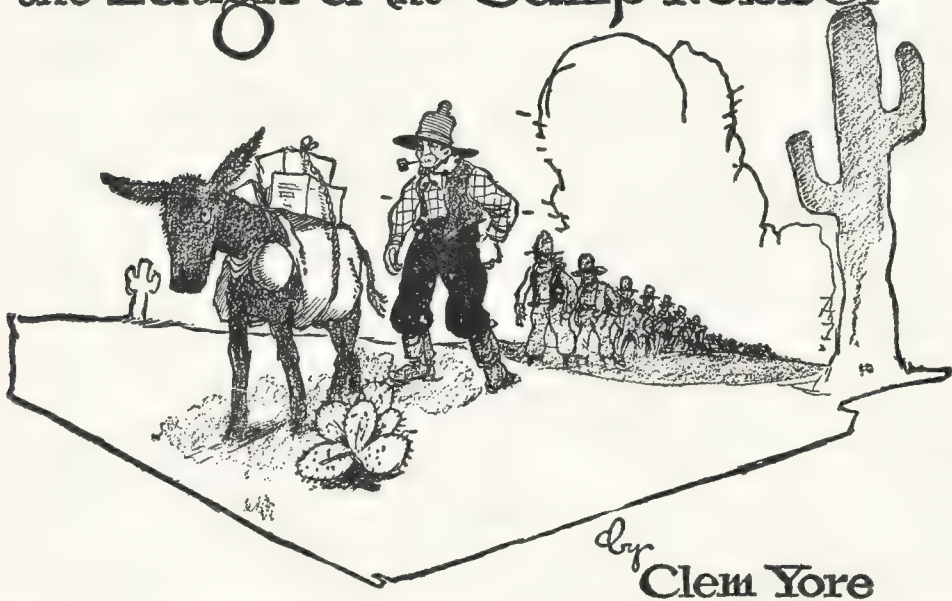
"You were—dead—right. Labor—can't exist without—capital—and the brains to direct it. That's beyond argument. No workingman's family is safe a single moment without law and order—any more than a rich man's family. If a workingman has the right to own his savings, or his cottage, or bit of land, and have that ownership protected—he must concede the same right to any other man who has inherited—or honestly made—a great deal larger sum. You can't attack—the one—without the other. Somehow—things look a bit differently. Possibly I just wouldn't see but the one side—before. I say! Did my transport sail?"

"Not knowing which one it was, I really can't say. But the War Department knows where you are and feels under some obligations to you for unmasking that boche. I fancy you'll do pretty much as you please about going home—and there'll be different markings on your shoulders when you do. Meanwhile, as long as you're comfortable, we really want you here. No spoofing! We do."

"Humph! And Salankoff would have cut your pretty throat! Destroyed every old place like this in England—leaving black ruin and famine in exchange. What a blithering idiot!"

There will be another of Clarence Herbert New's stories of the stirring events across the ocean in the next issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The Laugh of the Camp Robber



THE blithe tale of a Western election and a dark political-plot an' ever'thing. Have a laugh with Clem Yore and Sweet Mary.

THE town of Amble Some lay hectically hidden. Heat from the sand-torridity simmered in the reflections from the hills, while in the hearts of the male population an approaching election had changed their lives into November dog-days. For weeks gossip had been the mental diet. Tongues gently keyed to tattling had whispered many things, but the most important topic was the race for mayor—the race between Sweet Mary, the school-marm, and Sandy Whiskers Lawson.

It was the morning of the day before election. The town was filled with pinto ponies. They had come from the grass and sheep country, south and east; they had arrived from the purple-clad loco slopes of the foothills north and west, where cattle ran. Also were there wagons and fat mares, the carriers of women.

Every voter, in fact every human being older than eighteen within a radius of twenty miles, was intimately concerned with the ambitions of Sweet Mary and Sandy Whiskers. It was a war of the sexes brought home to the village of Amble Some, and both sexes voted in the State that saved Wilson.

Be it recorded that within the radius of twenty miles every inhabitant voted in the narrow confines of Amble Some's limits. The male residents of the district had achieved, by familiar living, the right to vote for control, irrespective of township and precinct. This idea was never challenged, so that it expanded into the pliable conscience of the female vote. The men were wholly resigned to remain content. They craved no newer order. By public approval they are willing to allow Amble Some to amble some more.

The womenfolk, who had voted with their husbands to save Wilson, had become of the opinion, under the brilliant leadership of the handsome school-teacher, that they would vote, without their husbands, to save Amble Some.

"Woman's privilege on the earth," Sweet Mary had declared, "is to keep constantly at work saving something. This idea is the basic principle underlying the need of votes for women."

It is purely logical that, these conditions obtaining, gossip and tattling and nightly caucuses should be the expression of the commonwealth.

A CANVASS by means of the personal promise, had been going on for some time, and so it developed, among the men, after an all-night session in the Last

Chance Saloon, that Sweet Mary was beaten by exactly one hundred and ten he-men votes. But notwithstanding the certitude of this résumé, Hank Peters accosted the fair candidate, coming back from the spring with a bucket of water in her hand, wearing a complacent smile, with an atmosphere *sans-souci*-like about her.

The impenetrable was always the impossible to Hank. He tried to draw her out into the fields of understanding, but the only privilege his suavity drew was the permission to draw and carry a galvanized bucket full of alkali water to her cabin door.

Down to the Last Chance he hurried with his burden of story.

"I'd a heap ruther," he said, "of seen her glum-like, than as she is. 'Taint natcheral for a candidate to grin and be joyful-like when he knows he's beat."

"What I wants to know is, how can a candidate know he's beat, when he's a she?" vouchsafed Two-finger Frank, foreman of the Four-Bar X outfit.

"That's the woman of it," replied Peters. "They's forever assayin' new ideas and payin' no 'tention to tried and true surface indications. Them's my only objections to women votin'. You can't learn 'em nothin'. What does my old woman know about the science of the ballot?"

"Jest keep 'em coyed up like," volunteered Sandy Whiskers, "and by the time all the votes is in, we can give 'em some valuable idee of politics; and then, sorter generous-like, we'll pull off a consolation-dance for the dames at night."

"That's right," said Two-finger. "If we try to rub it in, there'll be hell in these sands worse'n Gawd a'mighty ever put hyar."

"Step easy, boys," said Sandy. "Here comes Stutterin' Sam. Don't hurt his feelin's none by gloatin', for he's tramped forty mile from the hills to vote for Sweet Mary. If ever thar was a clean-cut case of heart bobcatin' the head, he's sure a walkin' example. He's plumb off his feed ever since he slanted an eye on her."

The Last Chance inmates looked out the door, past the pintos, wind sucking the hitching rack, far down the single street, to where their vision was arrested by a down-eared burro philosophically preceding a dust-covered man carrying a gunnysack swung across his shoulder. The burro was heavily laden. The dia-

mond hitch was neatly snug about his pack, but it was bulgingly tight, betokening a strain. The boys in the saloon watched man and beast plod up the street. Small swirls of whitened dust blew along the way after them. The burro came to a halt beside the pintos, and the man removed the packs. They were boxes. Strainingly he laid them upon the saloon platform. This done, he swung the gunnysack from his hand and entered the Last Chance.

"Have a driak, Stutterin'?" Sandy Whiskers greeted him.

"Nope," replied Stutterin' Sam. "I aint gu-gu-got bu-but a minute to stay. Will yer take ca-ca-care of this sack for me, Pete?" He threw the sack with a sweep on the top of the bar.

"Sure," said Pete. "What's in it?"

"That's wh-wh-what I wa-wanta find out," said Sam, smiling reticence. "Say, ca-ca-can I have the loan of a p-p-paint-p-p-pot and bu-bu-brush fer a minute?"

"Sure," replied Pete. "Back of the ice-box."

Sam secured the paint and brush, and without a word strode quickly through the men who lined the bar.

"Come down to vote, Sam?" queried Two-finger Frank.

"I aint a-sh-sh-shayin'," laughed Sam, and went outside, where he stooped over the boxes and labeled them. The eyes of the boys never left him.

When Sam had completed his task and returned the paint to its place behind the iceless ice-box, he walked from the Last Chance, kicked the burro into action and disappeared in the general direction of Sweet Mary's cabin.

The crowd surged upon the platform and examined the boxes.

"General Smeltin' Company," read Hank Peters aloud. "What's he sendin' out? That's what I wants to know."

They returned to their chairs, curiosity gnawing their vitals.

"Somethin' mighty funny 'bout that feller. I like him when he's drinkin', but as he is, he's a porcupine," said Panhandle Phil.

"Nothin' on earth changes a man's character quicker'n an absence from booze, and the longer the lapse, the more on'ry the disposition. But when you hitches up a galoot in that frame of mind to a squaw—oh, Lord, 'taint good to look at," agreed Cincinnati Larkin.

"He's the most even-tempered man in the valley," said Two-finger Frank. "He's half mad all the time."

"What's he got in the sack, Pete?" asked Hank Peters by way of inquiry.

"I allow it was left kinder casual-like, but if he'd 'a' wanted you coyotes to paw over it, he'd of spilled it on the floor," said Pete, likewise called Mamie Taylor Pete, by reason of his proficiency in concocting a lone mixed drink of similar appellation.

"Gunnysacks is the most mysterious and useful things ever im-por-ted into any sheep-country," said Big-foot Ike, who lived on Ten Mile and utilized such a commodity every Sunday night as a saddlebag.

"'Taint in it with barb wire," answered Two-finger Frank. "Why, barb wire is the most civ-il-izin' in-flu-ence ever created by man."

"Dried water-holes!" said One-eyed Johnny. "Barb wire leads yuh straight back to Pittsburgh, Andrew Carnegie and high protected tariff."

"Speakin' of inventions," said Mamie Taylor Pete, leaning confidingly upon the bar, "I wish somebody'd tell me what them flashes is I've been seein' back in the hills the last three days."

"Yes, an' I seen 'em too," coincided Hank Peters, "—kinder keerless-like, then sort of in bunches."

"Which way?" asked Panhandle Phil.

"Up on the big porphyry rim of Elk Mountain," answered Pete, coming out from behind the bar.

"I've tried to figger it out," he continued, "but it's got me. Sometimes it comes in bunches like Hank says, then steady-like and sometimes rapid. That's a sure invention that can flash like that, and old Elk is a good forty mile from here. You can't tell how fur that thing'd squirt across the desert."

"Maybe it's a survey gang," some one said from the edge of the crowd. "I hears the Western's got her eye on this valley."

"Nope," returned Pete. "Them flashes, seems like, is meant for Amble Some. Nobody in this burg has seen a railroad since last spring's round-up."

AT this moment a cow-dog paraded by the open door and sought the shade of the water-trough. Two sheep-men saw it and turned about, carefully examining the business lines of its form.

"Part Airedale," said one.

"German shepherd," replied the other.

"Sufferin' snakes!" impetuously said Panhandle Phil. "I hate these arguments. Can't you fellers stop quarrelin' till we figgers out what that there thing is that Pete and Hank been tellin' of?"

The sheep-men, docile as are their kind, and given to inundating silences, discontinued their dog-gazing.

"Nope," continued Pete, "I tell you that's not a railroad thing. It sure has me locoed."

"I know what I think it is," suggested Postmaster Windy Will: "it's a thing they uses in the army. A heel o' graft, I think they calls it. I've seen pictures of 'em. They looks like a camera set up on a tripod, and works with lookin'-glasses."

"What's it do?" asked Pete.

"Sends telegrams same as telegraph wire. They has a way of makin' a long flash mean a dash, and a short one a dot; and by keepin' track of them things and countin' 'em, they spells words."

"Gosh a'mighty!" cried Hank. "I sure got a hunch."

"Spit it out," said Sandy Whiskers. "Don't keep us all keyed up."

"Day afore yesterday," said Hank, "I was a-sittin' in my front room lookin' across the arroyo that runs between me and Sweet Mary's place, and I seen her on top her porch. I never figgered much, jest reckoned she was up there takin' pictures of clouds and sunbursts, like she's always tellin' my old woman of; but come to think of it now, I seen them flashes from Elk Mountain at the same time, and she seen 'em too. She was a-workin' somethin' set up on three legs. At the time I reckoned it was a camerie."

"You're sure a smart one," said One-eyed Johnny. "Don't you *sabe* this woman a-tall? Aint Stutterin' Sam so nutty he's been prospectin' Elk Mountain for the last three weeks, and him and her been so lonesome-like, they've jest rigged up one of these here machines, homemade, to keep the heart-fires heated. It's too simple. Give me some cyanide, Pete."

Silence dropped. Men crowded the bar sheepishly. One-eyed Johnny, satisfied with his effect on the boys, bought all the way around. But Hank Peters, first having made sure his drink was consumed, strolled over to the back window and glanced at the hills. As he did so, he turned to the men and shouted:

"Keep the heart fires heated, eh? Well, you fellers mosey over here and you can see the durn thing workin' right now, and Stutterin' Sam's in town."

There was a hurried gulping of unfinished drinks and a piling around the rear window.

"Sure enough," said One-eyed Johnny. "I'm done. You fellers take 'er."

"I'll chance a shot," said Panhandle Phil. "That's Sweet Mary's brother Bill, what's up on the prospect with Sam. Mary's in on the grubstake. I tell you, fellers, I reckon I've got a idee. They've got somethin' good up there. Look at them two boxes outside. What's in that gunnysack? That's what I'm askin'—what's in that gunnysack?"

"By golly, you're almost human, Panhandle," said Ike. "Holy smoke, what if them yahoos'd strike a new camp! There's a clever woman, that Mary. I tell you fellers eddication counts. A new camp! By gum, the Injuns used to tap them hills. Why not?"

RIOTOUS conjecture reigned. Glowing tales of old camps and wondrous yarns of sudden riches filled the minds of the men in the Last Chance saloon. The heat began to grow. It fattened in the air and bulged into the houses. Out on the mesa it shimmered and spangled in spirals. Lizards panted under the mesquite; rattlesnakes lazed fully stretched; Gila monsters opened their mouths out of a full delight; turtledoves cooed their incomparable love-songs in the chapparal, and ravens flew high, winging their way to coolness. The dove, being the bird of affection, lives and loves in regions where the plutonian bird will not even hesitate.

The day passed slowly, ever so slowly to the waiting women who crowded the homes of friends in town. At the noon meal wives passed pinto beans and spuds to their spouses with a new toleration. Visiting voters were treated as guests. There was a certain aloofness between the sexes in Amble Some that forebode change.

Men forge upon their doom with uncertain unconcern. It was the first election Amble Some ever knew that was gunless. One-eyed Johnny had to borrow a forty-five from Mamie Taylor Pete, for the sake of drinking his liquor as was his wont, unperturbed. Wives had asked this concession of their husbands. Toleration is the tool of those who conquer. Cin-

cinnati, who came West because of woman's perfidy, had often said, "Women and cats jest tolerates men." The election, the excitement attendant upon the hill-flashes and contents of boxes and gunnysack, held all the conversation of the men until four o'clock came in with a cloud of alkali dust as Keno Jack drove up with a weather-beaten Concord stage hitched to six smoking cayuses. People crowded Keno for news; Keno crowded the bar for booze.

"Well, Sandy," said Keno, "how's she goin', wet or dry, male or female?"

"You jest tell 'em over at Sand Creek that we can spare 'em an even hundred if the women's got 'em scared. Jest let us know to-night, any time."

"Over at Lulu," said Keno, "they're bettin' Mary'll skin you fellows. I hopes yuh don't let 'er."

"Ugh!" said Panhandle as he walked out to the stage. He examined the contents of the stage "boot," the carrying space for dead baggage. In it he found a box addressed to Sweet Mary. He turned back to the bar and accosted the stage-driver.

"What's the box for Mary?" he asked.

"Who wants to know?" replied Keno and continued his drinking.

KENO was one of the real pillars of the society of the valley, as the desert was called in contradistinction to the hills. He made sixty miles of that valley daily and was known far and wide for two things. He was a great loser at keno, and on his heels were silver dollars whittled down to shape. One of his prides—he had many—was to speak no gossip about the freight he hauled, either "alive or dead," as he called his passengers and baggage.

Sweet Mary had come down to meet the stage with the rest of the village, and with her came Stutterin' Sam. She was comely like the cactus flower. She looked cool and contented. Into the barroom she came, and smiled around the room. The boys, as is the custom of their kind, sprang to their feet and faced about to greet her. Courtesy in the desert is quick. Hats were off and cigarettes were flung floorward. The wide stretches of the sandy mesas know how to put the worth of woman-kind into the souls of their frizzled men.

Mary spoke to Keno.

"Have you a package for me, Keno?"

"Yes, miss, and powerful heavy, too," he replied.

"I'll gu-gu-get it," said Sam, and set about the task.

"I wish you would take those two boxes on the outside and send them express, Keno," said Mary, indicating the boxes Sam had packed in from the hills.

"I'll sure do it, miss," said Keno; and then: "Here's luck for you to-morrow, miss."

Keno raised a glass brimming full and nodded to Mary.

"Thank you, Keno," she said. "Drink hearty! That will be your last drink in Amble Some."

She smiled at Sandy Whiskers and left the Last Chance.

"Gawd a'mighty," said Keno as he watched Mary join Sam in the street; "suppose it should! Give me some more of that poison, *pronto*."

Keno's horses having been changed, he departed. The boys watched the dust-cloud raised by the stage disappear over the rim of the distant hog-back and then filed into the Last Chance, taking up the toil of waiting for something to happen. Humanity can withstand suspense just so long; after a while the soul becomes sick.

Big-foot Ike's soul had become ill and his brain befuddled from drink. His first evidence of unrest was a soft warbling—*sotto voce*. Pete heard the hushed tones and whispered to Hank Peters:

"Big-foot's goin' to bust into song."

"Let him howl," said Hank. "I feels like chantin' a hymn myself."

The warbling grew, gaining volume but little tone. At length Big-foot slipped one lean and lank leg over the back of his chair and rent the heat waves of the desert with song:

Nothin' never happens, as far as I kin see,
Nothin' never happened, unto the likes
o' me.

I tuk a shot at old good luck,
But I never rung the bell.
So nothin' never happens—till
They—shear—us—down—in—hell.

The last words struggled, then sank into the very abysses of the singer's anatomy. When the gurgle was finally emitted and the round of applause had died away, Hank Peters jumped into the room's center and flung his sombrero at his feet. Pete, wise, always wise, to the moods of his patrons, shouted:

"Now, easy, Hank—easy now. Don't give the women no chance to get somethin' on us."

"No galoot can stop me from howlin' when I wants to howl," shouted Hank, "and I'm sure goin' to shriek. Listen to me, all you sheep-ticks—hear me!"

A coyote hates a rattlesnake;
A buzzard hates a bee;
A sheep-dog loves a sheep-man
'Cause he knows he's company.
The wild cow loves her nose up
When she tries to bust the bunch.
And a sheep-man knows a cow-man
Is a tough old bird to munch.

Without attempt at breathing, Hank glared at Pete and the sheep-men, and launched into the next verse:

A greaser makes a herder
That no white man ever beat;
For no white man is a herder,
From the color of his meat.
Oh, I've often studied o'er it,
An' it's often made me weep,
To think that some men think they're white
When they're herdin' mangy sheep.

"Well, by dern," said Pete, "if yuh aint kicked the bottom out'n everything!" Big-foot Ike, acknowledged king of the sheep-men, half arose at the end of the song, then settled back in his chair. The cowmen separated themselves from the sheepmen. Sandy Whiskers' face was a mold of changing expression. Every human emotion played across it. The election would probably not have come off the following day had not Stutterin' Sam at that precise moment come through the door.

"Kin I h-h-have m-m-m-my gu-gu-gun-nysack, Pete?" he asked.

"Sure," said Pete, and he handed the sack to him. Without comment of any sort Sam strode from the Last Chance. Pete relieved the tension by allowing:

"There'll be no more melody here, or no more lickier. Those as love singin', sing—but go out in the corral. Those addicted to the real game of life and have a hankerin' after strong drink, belly up here. I'm about to spill."

"I feel as how I aint howlin' none," apologized Hank. "How about you, Ike?"

"My throat's plumb dry," replied Big-foot, "and anyhow, I can't howl much like I used to do; anyway, it don't sound jest right till after sundown."

To these men drink arbitrated all questions. To drink with a man was to live with him, for the nonce, in peace. It was

not altogether an assurance of permanency, but it was a healing force that could be added to from time to time.

PLACIDITY paved the way of the early night. The oldest inhabitant marveled at the manner in which the cow-and sheep-men mingled. Pintos were put in the corrals and fed. The desert was a purple haze when the young moon rose. Shadows built themselves fantastically about the mesquite, and the Spanish needles sentineled the scene. Bats flew about eerily, and the desert owl cried above the sleeping doves.

The lights of the town twinkled like fireflies, from hog-back and gulch. The suppers were identical with the dinners. All the wives were winsome. This put the men ill at ease; it was unfathomable. After the evening meal the sexes separated; the males congregated in the Last Chance, and when the school-bell rang silverly over the stillness, the women made their way together to the schoolhouse—where femininity indulged in oratory.

Promptly at nine o'clock Stutterin' Sam came into the Last Chance carrying the gunnysack. He put down the sack.

"Ca-ca-can I bu-bu-bunk with you to-night, Pete?" he asked.

"Sure you can," said Pete.

"All right. Ju-ju-just keep my sack," said Sam. "I'm gu-gu-going over to Henry's for so-some grub."

Every man watched him leave the room, then they flocked around the sack.

"What's he got in that sack, I'd like to know," said Panhandle Phil.

"Feel the heft of it," answered Pete, raising the sack from the bar. As he laid it down, a rent in the sack exposed a mass of high-grade gold quartz. The rock was honeycombed with streaks of wire-gold! Hungry hands penetrated the sack and brought the specimens to the glare of the lamps. Never had man seen prettier ore. Silence ruled, and men edged prettier round, talking of "values." Brains smoky with whisky and suppressed excitement cleared. One thought occupied the minds of all. A new camp up on Elk Mountain, and Amble Some the first town to get the news!

"Say," said Big-foot Ike, "the stam-pede into them hills'll be worse than the Exodus."

Presently Sam returned and took his

sack from the bar. As he walked from the saloon, Two-finger Frank addressed him.

"What's the rush?"

"I'm leavin' early in the mo-mo-morn-in'," he replied, halting.

"Aint you goin' to vote?" asked Sandy.

"Aint gu-gu-got time," replied Sam. "I'm leaving at sunup. Bill and me's out of grub, and I gu-gu-got to get back."

"Plenty more stuff like that yuh got in the sack?" queried Cincinnati.

"Lots of it," replied Sam.

"Ship some out with Keno like it?" asked Hank.

"Yu-yu-you fellers is too damn' inquisitive," replied Sam, and walked out.

The organ in the schoolhouse pealed forth the strains to the air, "Lips That Touch Liquor Shall Never Touch Mine." The desert stirred, and the night-wind carried the laugh of a screech owl into the borders of Amble Some. The Last Chance was soon empty.

THERE were many men back of Sam as he walked over the desert at day-break. All day he prodded the burro and fought the sun. Forty miles is a hard day's journey, wherever you travel, but on the desert it is simply forty miles of torture. The forty miles brought Sam and those behind him to the very foot of Elk Mountain a little after five.

"Where's the camp?" asked Ike.

"Up back of th-th-them qu-qu-qu-quakin' asps," replied Sam.

Up the trail went everybody, two hundred of them. At six o'clock they dismounted around a tent from which smiled the face of Sweet Mary's brother Bill.

"Where's the hole?" questioned Pete.

"What hole?" asked Bill.

"Your prospect," said Pete.

"Ask Stutterin'."

"He's kiddin' yuh," said Sam. "That ore co-co-come from the Highland Boy mine at Thirty Mile."

Then Bill walked over to Sam.

"How's the election?" he asked.

"Gawd a'mighty!" said Hank, comprehension flashing across his mind. "Aint she cute! Not a man voted."

The clown of the hill-birds, the camp-robber, flew up in a spruce and jeered.

"Come on, you fellows, and help me peel spuds," laughed Sweet Mary's brother.

"Through Storm to Understanding," an impressive drama of life among Western mountaineer folk, by Clem Yore, will appear in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Arms and the Woman



B.O. Frederick

A MOST unusual and wholly attractive story of an army surgeon and of a girl who proved she was well worth marrying.

MILLICENT GARNER had no criticism to make of Ben Hosmer as a man, but that did not necessarily imply that she wanted him as a husband. She was perfectly willing, however, to admit—to herself—that a great many things could be said in his favor as a possible husband if one were interested in that subject. Of all the men she knew—and as one of the most striking débutantes of recent seasons she knew a great many—he undoubtedly averaged the highest in her estimation. He was extremely good-looking without being good-looking enough to have called down on his shapely head the adjective *handsome*. He had cowlicks in his hair, for one thing. You could no more have slicked smooth that straight, wiry, sandy shock than you could have called him Benjamin—as his parents intended should be done when they christened him. His gray-blue eyes were quite perfect, but his nose and mouth were too large—roughly large. He was too big all over, anyway. He was absurd in golf-clothes—as absurd as his method of play, which consisted almost entirely in a boyish delight at seeing how far he

could hit the ball. When he struck it fair, it went a long way, but he was just as apt to do this when he was putting as when he was driving. He had not taken up the game until he was through with football, which was not so very long ago.

Furthermore, Ben Hosmer was honest and sincere and capable. He was in his third year at the Johns Hopkins Medical School and working hard to complete his course this summer in order to go into the army, where he was very much needed. Lack of time to practice may have partly accounted for his poor golf. Still, when he did manage to get off long enough to make a round of the links with her, he did not improve even this opportunity. He wasted many minutes talking, and when she was too far ahead of him, he used to pick up his ball and skip a couple of holes rather than settle down to business. Even if you wish to be kind to a man, you cannot call that good golf. They always tore up the score-cards before they reached the clubhouse.

It was rather absurd, but from the first day she met Hosmer, she had a desire to be kind to him. She did not know exactly what she meant by that, because

in a good many ways it was as though a silken-haired, blue-ribboned Maltese kitten should determine to be considerate of a well-intentioned St. Bernard who, nevertheless, could at any moment, as far as strength was concerned, pick her up and make off with her. She was slight and dark-haired, with even, fine patrician features, and she could, when she chose, toss up her chin and meet a man eye to eye in a fashion that discounted all advantage he might possess in weight. Perhaps it was by not doing this too often that she meant to be kind to him.

BUT—taking advantage of her good nature—he was always throwing upon her all sorts of unreasonable responsibilities. She had to speak to him about putting on his sweater when he was through playing—the black sweater with the big letter which he wore inside out. She had to warn him about not smoking too many cigarettes. When after not seeing her for several days he appeared with dark rings under his eyes, she had to warn him not to study so hard and advise him to take more exercise.

A doctor should have known all those things, and she rather resented being placed in the position of medical adviser. She was not accustomed to looking after other people; other people always looked after her. It had been so from the days of nurses and French governesses.

Nor was this solicitude confined to Millicent's paid retinue. Her father and mother were as anxious as anyone else to serve her. As for the men she met at the clubhouse on the days when Ben could not get away, they waited around her in groups, well satisfied if they found an opportunity to do as much as hand her golf-bag to the caddy. For always she smiled in return for such little attentions, and her smile was something to remember, as men remember a smile from a princess.

The Garners remained in town that summer. It was an unusual thing to do, but Garner himself could not get away. His business had trebled in the last year, and he could not leave it. His wife and daughter might have gone, however, for he could have made himself comfortable at any one of several clubs; but the daughter appeared indifferent either to Newport or to the mountains. She advised her mother because of her health to open the Newport house, and this the latter

did, which left Millicent alone with her father.

The girl rather enjoyed the arrangement. Though the management of the household devolved upon her, this gave her in a way a sense of larger freedom; and with fewer social obligations, she could do even more fully as she pleased. She fell into the way of getting up earlier in the morning and breakfasting with her father. It made her feel quite matronly. It gave her, too, a fresh interest in this man about whom she really knew so little. This last year she had hardly ever seen him out of his evening clothes, in which men look as much alike as so many penguins. She thought him very attractive as he came down fresh-shaven with a boutonnière in his morning coat, alert for the day's business. Sometimes he even talked over with her the affairs he had in hand in a confidential way that flattered her.

After her father left, she was quite free until night except when Hosmer telephoned that he could steal a few hours. Of course, strictly speaking, she was free even then. She was under no obligation always to be available, and could easily have pleaded another engagement. But even when she was with him, she was still free. That was another thing she liked about the man; he never gave her a sense of being pursued. There was never any need for her to be the slightest bit on guard. She had no eyes to watch, no parrying to do, no questioning of his or her thoughts. She was probably franker and more natural with him than with her own father.

THOSE days on the course of the Waumbek Club were days to be remembered. Always the sun seemed to shine fair out of a clear blue sky when he came, and the cool green of the turf was sweet to all the senses. Birds sang, and little insects crooned lazily. It was more like some Kate Greenaway world than anything in real life. She felt secure, as though indeed each day were fixed for all time in a picture. One might close the book now and then, but always one could turn back to it at will, or at least whenever Ben could get away from the Medical School.

It was one afternoon toward the end of the day that Hosmer made an extraordinary drive as far as distance was concerned—but at least two thirds of it was beyond the hole. The hunt for the ball,

in which she joined, took them to the left of a hazard of trees, and finding a shady spot there, he suggested they pretend this was the nineteenth hole.

"I'll give you this game," he determined. "Let's chat a moment."

"But we haven't found the ball," she protested.

"I don't want it," he replied. "That crack was worth a ball."

She sat down, curling her feet beneath her and carefully covering her trim ankles. He sat down beside her. He was silent a moment, and then he said somewhat abruptly:

"They are pushing us harder than ever in school. They want to use us in August."

"Yes?"

"I guess the army is short of medics."

"Doctor Watterson—you know him?" she asked.

"Old Hoss Watterson?" he nodded. "I played football against him. He was one class ahead of me."

"I hear from him occasionally. He says he's working very hard."

"He's a good man. It's twenty hours a day for those fellows. Doesn't leave them much time to think, does it?"

"Or anything else."

Lazily she looked through half-closed eyes, green acres at her feet—a fixed, immobile sea of green. Above that was another, blue sea—the sea of the sky, calm this afternoon as the stare of a blue-eyed child. It was impossible for her to visualize anything beyond this.

"Milly," said Hosmer, "did it ever occur to you that I might fall in love?"

"Nonsense!" she laughed.

"With you," he explained.

"More nonsense."

"No," he went on soberly, "it would be quite the rational thing to do—under normal circumstances."

She was not sure, but she felt there was the slightest bit of hot color in her cheeks.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded.

It was the first time she had been forced to ask him to explain.

"If all the world were like this little bit of it here," he answered, "if there wasn't any 'over there,' I'm afraid I shouldn't be able to keep a grip on myself. The bunch say they're up against pretty stiff work—and worse than that. The Huns have a way of picking out hospital units for spe-

cial attention from above. They got Pete Shirley that way."

"You—you are going to get killed?" she demanded.

He smiled at that.

"I didn't mean to work up any heroics," he hastened to assure her. "Only a man might as well face the facts. You can't exactly call that life normal; and so—and so a man can't plan ahead for normal things."

She did not reply, and so he went ahead a little further.

"Like asking a girl to marry him."

Miss Garner met his eyes at that—with the slightest bit of a toss of her head. Then she looked back at the sea-green turf.

"Because," he said, "if you're going away and leave her—it doesn't seem quite fair."

"It sounds strange to hear you talking like this," she commented with a puzzled frown.

"I'm only repeating what I've been saying for a month to myself."

"I thought—well, I thought you were content to allow everything to go on just as it is."

"Like you?"

"Yes," she answered directly.

"Just playing golf?"

"Oh, it's more than that," she returned quickly. "If it were only golf, it wouldn't be very much, would it?"

"Referring to my last stroke?" he grinned.

She was pretty enough at that moment to make a man gasp for breath. His eyes would have shown her how pretty he thought her had she not kept away from them.

"It's more than golf," she repeated, as though anxious to have him understand. "It wouldn't be quite the same out here—even with a champion."

"Then in spite of my golf, you—you like me a little."

"Oh, I like you ever so much."

"You love me—a little?"

"Not that," she protested. "It's because we could be together without—loving, that it has been so nice to be together."

He squinted his eyes thoughtfully.

"I see," he nodded. "I guess in your way you have worked to the same conclusion I did."

"We've been so sort of comfy together," she explained.

"All of that," he agreed. "And it isn't much use to hope for anything more?"

"It isn't best," she suggested.

"I guess you're right," he admitted.

But instead of sitting on there as he might have done, he made his feet and held out his hand to help her rise. She felt the strength of him as he lifted. So they returned to the clubhouse.

MILLICENT GARNER still had no criticism to make of Ben Hosmer as a man, but still that did not necessarily imply she wanted him as a husband. She did not want anyone as a husband. She was getting along well enough as it was, and there seemed to be no particular point in complicating her life. But in spite of her mother's pleading, she refused to go to Newport even for a week-end.

"I think Dad needs me here," she wrote.

She was quite sincere in that. She was finding more and more to do in the management of the house. It was necessary to find more to do in order to keep from reviewing too often that conversation with Hosmer. There was no sense in going over it word for word half a dozen times a day. So she undertook, after a consultation with her father, the renovating of several rooms, and this required a good deal of thought. Then she joined a Red Cross chapter and occupied herself several afternoons a week rolling bandages. Evenings, she took it upon herself to get her father out—not in evening clothes, but just as he came home from business—to vaudeville and cabarets. He enjoyed this, especially as she never allowed him to stay late. She even persuaded him to take up golf again, and now and then appeared at his office in the machine and dragged him off to Waumbek. Several times she matched him against Hosmer, and because he won, he flattered himself that his game was improving. He was glad to see more of the young man. He liked him. Sometimes the doctor came back to the house with them for dinner.

But this was not often, because he was on the last stretch now, and every hour counted. He was never able to get away more than once a week. She thought the strain was beginning to tell on him. He seemed to be losing weight and appeared more serious. And this disturbed her somewhat. It was almost as though he were changing into another man—an older man.

Then one day—as unexpectedly as though she had never dreamed of it as a possibility—he appeared to her in the uniform of a lieutenant of the Medical Reserve Corps. It made him look taller and slimmer, and he wore it much better than he did his golf suit. All his slouchiness had disappeared,—she missed it a little,—and he stood square-shouldered as a West Pointer. He was smiling again and his forehead was smooth.

"I got through all right," he announced, "and I'm to report for duty to-morrow."

"Over there?" she gasped.

"Not yet. I'll probably go to some training-camp for a while."

Though he spent the rest of the day with her and came home to dinner and spent the evening, all she could remember of what he said was what he said in bidding her good-by.

"I'll keep you posted where I am if you'll let me."

"Please," she answered.

"And I shall always be glad I learned golf."

"You might have made a very good player if you had taken it more seriously."

"I did take it seriously—that was the trouble," he smiled.

Now, what did he mean by that? It was not thoughtful of him to leave her with so ambiguous a remark to worry about. He turned on his heels and went before she had time to question him.

THE next day he telephoned that he was assigned to an aviation camp in Texas and was leaving at once. That was the last week in August.

In the first week in September Doctor Watterson came back on a furlough. Though without a wound, he looked battle-scarred. He had got tanned on the journey home and somewhat rested, but there still lingered in his eyes pictures of what he had been seeing during this last year. One of the first people he called upon outside his family was Miss Garner. He came on a mission—a quixotic mission such as those who knew him might expect of him. Because he had known her ever since she was a little girl, he was one of the few men who had never fallen in love with her; and because of this, too, he ventured his astounding present proposal. It was nothing less than that she undertake the care of little Pauline Picot, a black-haired, black-eyed orphan girl of

four whom he had brought back with him because of a promise he made her father.

It was absurd; it was impossible.

"What should I do with her?" she gasped.

Old Horse Watterson—as big-bodied as Hosmer—looked around the luxuriously appointed room and thought of the shell-torn hovels he had stood among less than twelve days ago. He had found Pauline after the death of the father, as he had promised to find her—found her half starved and half clothed, but still able to smile, with only a cellar to crawl into at night with a dozen other children and sad-eyed women.

"You mean you haven't room?" he asked.

She flushed.

"You know better than that," she replied. "But I don't know anything about children."

"There isn't so very much you need to know," he answered. "But perhaps your mother—"

"Mother is not in good health."

Watterson was disappointed. He thought he knew the girl, and it seemed he did not know her at all.

"It's because in these last two weeks I have grown very fond of her that I thought of you," he said. "She is with my brother's wife, and of course she can remain there. But I had a notion the idea might appeal to you."

She wanted to explain what the difficulties were, but she gathered that those would not interest him. He had just come from a region where difficulties were never considered. They were ignored. He had done just that when he had found the child, and brought her back with him against a thousand sane objections.

WATTERSON remained long enough to be polite, and then left. That evening her father found her in an unusual mood.

"Tired?" he asked anxiously.

"No," she answered.

"I'm afraid the house is too much for you," he suggested. "Perhaps we'd better send for Mother."

"No—I'd be ashamed if you did," she broke in quickly. "But Dick Watterson was here to-day—"

"Back from France?"

"On a furlough. He—he brought a little Belgian child with him."

"That's a queer thing to do."

"It's just like him, Dad. Don't you remember how as a boy he used to bring home all the stray dogs he ran across?"

"But a child—well, a child is different."

"The father was badly wounded, and before he died he asked Dick to care for the little girl. Her name is Pauline. Dick promised. I suppose under those conditions they always do. Only with Dick a promise is a promise. So he used part of his furlough finding her, and because he couldn't think of any other way of caring for her he brought her home."

"He'll have quite a family if he keeps on doing that," suggested Garner.

"He—he wanted me to take her," she went on.

"What?" shouted Garner.

"He wanted me to bring her here."

"Bah! The man's crazy," growled Garner. "What do you know about children? Besides, there are societies—aren't there?—who do that sort of thing?"

"I think so," she answered.

"I'll have Chandler look one up to-morrow as soon as I get to the office," he decided.

On the surface this seemed like an easy way out of the difficulty, and yet it did not satisfy the girl completely. She thought about it at odd times all that night—waking up out of a sound sleep to think about it. The next morning, just as her father was leaving, she took hold of both lapels of his coat and kissed him. Then she said:

"I—I wouldn't do anything about the societies until I see Dick again."

THAT forenoon, just as soon as Millicent felt sure the men-folks were gone, she drove around to the Wattersons'. She thought Isobel appeared somewhat constrained, but as soon as she explained that she had come to see Pauline and take her for a drive, Mrs. Watterson's manner changed entirely.

"That's dear of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Watterson. "She'd love to go. It seems so strange to hear her chatter in French. Really, she makes me feel quite ignorant."

She led Miss Garner to the nursery,—a large sun-flooded room on the second floor,—where Pauline was playing with the youngest Watterson in a toy world of wooden horses and fluffy dogs on wheels and patient cotton-wool rabbits and staring dolls. Millicent had not seen this kind

of world for a good many years. It was like a visit to some foreign land, and for a few moments she felt awkward in it. At her entrance all play ceased for courtesies except from Pauline. For a moment she retreated shyly and stared at this newcomer. She was big-eyed and woefully thin, even now.

Miss Garner impulsively held out her arms toward the child.

"Tu n'as pas peur de moi?" she pleaded.

At the sound of her own language, even making exception to the very American accent, the child ran forward.

Instantly it was as though Miss Garner had received her credentials to some secret society. In another moment she was on the floor, romping with Pauline and the others. Mrs. Watterson withdrew.

Dick Watterson had said that it was not necessary to know very much about children, and in half an hour she believed it. It was only necessary to remember. It was curious how much she remembered. Old games came back to her as though she had ceased playing them only yesterday. When Mrs. Watterson returned, Miss Garner was on her knees as a Morgan steed upon which Pauline was riding to the Fair. Her hair was quite disarranged. Miss Garner sprang to her feet. Even her usually calm eyes were disarranged.

"You'll let her come to ride with me?" she pleaded as though some doubt existed.

"Of course she'll go with you. Only I haven't had time yet to arrange about the child's clothes."

"Can't I do that?"

"Why—if you wish."

"I can take her shopping this morning, can't I?"

"Certainly. I'll make her fairly presentable in some of Isobel's old dresses, but I've given away most of them."

Miss Garner turned to the child.

"You'll come with me?" she asked in French.

"Oui, madame," Pauline answered unhesitatingly.

"She trusts you," laughed Mrs. Watterson.

SO it happened that in less than an hour from the time she left her house, Miss Millicent Garner was driving down Fifth Avenue with a black-eyed child by her side instead of an empty seat—a child who

sought her gloved hand and asked her countless questions about things of which she did not know questions any longer existed. Miss Garner next was making her way into shops with this child clinging to her. With more color in her cheeks than usual she was asking to be directed to the children's departments. She was making critical selections of everything from shoes to underclothes, to street dresses, to house dresses, to hats and handkerchiefs and hair-ribbons. And when she had to give the address to which the goods were to be sent, she gave her own address. She did not know why. She had not made up her mind to anything.

After this there was not much time left for a ride in the Park, but she drove up there for a minute just to keep her promise, and then back to Mrs. Watterson's.

Dick had come home to his brother's to lunch. He greeted Millicent with a hand-grip that did her soul good, and the child ran up to him and kissed him.

"She makes me want to get back, and she makes me ache to think I can't stay," he said.

He wanted Miss Garner to remain to lunch, but she had other business. Before she left, however, she turned to Dick.

"You'll let me take her—if I can?"

"There's no one I'd rather have her with," he replied earnestly. It would seem from this that he did know her, after all.

Wall Street was a very busy place at this time of day, and there was no busier section of it than the offices occupied by Garner and Stockbridge. Deals involving many thousands of dollars were about to be closed or were being closed or just had been closed. Every minute was as good as a bank-note. It was no place for women, no time for interruptions. And yet as confidentially as though she had been a representative of the Government at Washington, Miss Garner demanded entrance to the inner office of Garner marked "*Private*." After getting in there, instead of waiting for any business to be completed, she coolly presented her own business, though by no stretch of the imagination could it be considered as presenting any possibility of profit. In fact, it rather bade fair to stand Garner a net loss in dollars and cents if what she had done this morning was any criterion.

"If you've come to get me out to the Waumbek, I can't go," announced Garner rather impatiently.

"I haven't come for that," she replied, drawing a chair close to his desk.

"Well—I'm very busy."

"I know it, Dad. So am I. I haven't had time for lunch."

"Sorry, but I can't take you to-day. I—"

"I haven't time either."

"What—"

"I want you to let me have Pauline," she announced abruptly. That, at least, was businesslike and to the point.

"What?"

"Dick's Pauline," she explained. "I've been over to Isobel's to see her, and I've taken her downtown and bought clothes for her, and now—I want to take her home."

"The deuce you do! What'll we do with her there?"

"I'll find a place, dear old Dad."

His private secretary was across the room, but his head was turned discreetly aside. Nevertheless he saw her rise and kiss the gray-haired man. And if he had been asked to choose—which he wasn't—between that kiss and all the money Garner bade fair to make before night, he—he would not have chosen the money.

"I don't know," Garner hesitated. "It's something we ought to think over."

She settled back in her chair.

"Very well, Dad. Think it over. I'll wait."

But at that point his private telephone rang, and a boy entered with three telegrams, and his secretary announced that Rollins was waiting to see him before taking the train to Washington, and on top of that handed him two important letters to sign.

"Oh, well," he concluded, "take her, only—don't bind yourself to anything."

THERE was plenty of room in the big house,—great chambers especially intended for guests,—but Pauline was so small that Millicent was half afraid that if she left the child in one of them she might not be able to find her the next morning. Besides, in the new house Pauline had suddenly grown timid. She did not cry, but she clung to the girl's hand, and when she could not find that, to her dress, and followed her about everywhere with her big eyes bigger than ever. So the only thing to do was to have a cot placed in her dressing-room, where if she woke in the dark, Millicent could hear her. That

was positively the only thing to do, though Annette, who had taken an instant liking to the *petite*, expressed herself as perfectly willing to remain with her at night.

It was here that Garner was taken up to see her when he came home. Tired out, the child was asleep. She lay with her pink cheek on her thin arm, the clothes cuddled up to her chin. Garner stared at her and then at his daughter, who stooped to smooth out a wrinkle on the spread as if fearing a wrinkle might disturb her.

"You can expect most anything these days," he exclaimed below his breath, "but this—"

"I wonder," said Millicent, "I wonder if she dreams in French!"

That night she lay awake wondering about other things—about France, which now seemed so near; about Dick, who said that he must go back; and about Ben, who was getting ready to go. She had not heard from him yet. Of course, if he waited to write, she would not hear for some time; but if he wished—that would be the natural thing to do. Yet it was difficult sometimes to tell what was the natural thing and what was not. This led her into a very big speculative subject—a subject with all sorts of curious byways into which she strayed quite innocently, only to be brought up suddenly by some conclusion that stood across her path like a man with folded arms bidding her stop or explain her presence. She was glad it was dark.

Beginning that next morning, she found her life very full of little things to do that extended all through the day. This was not like the Red Cross, where one had certain definite hours. There was never a time except when Pauline was fast asleep at the end of the day when there was not something to do for her. In spite of this, she seemed to have more time than ever on her hands in which to worry about Ben Hosmer. This was the first time he had ever been away from her for so long a period—that is, since the middle of the winter when she first met him. Before that, he had been out of her life for some twenty years and she had never given a thought to it. And for all she knew, he might be gone another twenty years—and perhaps longer.

It was this possibility which began to frighten her. It began when one day Pauline took to calling her "*Maman*." Miss Garner was alone with the child, and

she seized her and hid her burning face in the black hair.

"You must never call me that," she whispered.

"But you are beautiful like my *maman*."

"You remember her?"

"No; but she was beautiful."

"Yes, she must have been beautiful, because you are beautiful."

"Yes, *Maman*," Pauline replied simply.

THE girl remained curiously persistent. This woman was good to her and dressed her and cared for her, and therefore she was a mother. This was what made little girls mothers to their dolls. That was all there was to it.

If Miss Garner had let it go at that, this indeed would have been all there was to it. But she did not. She could not. Dolls do not have warm lips; dolls do not have clinging arms; dolls do not have big-eyed faith; and dolls do not look up to one as something wonderfully sacred. Pauline used to look up at her like that at night after she had said "*Bonne nuit*" and cuddled down into the blankets as confidently as one puts one's trust in God.

It left Miss Garner much to think about, and it roused emotions in her that she did not know existed—big, full-bosomed emotions that were inextricably mixed up with the universe and the dead mother in France and with the mothers in this country who had sons in France, and her part in it and Ben Hosmer's part in it and— and love.

For long she shied away from that word. But in the end it was the only word inclusive enough to bind together all these strange thoughts. It had expanded from anything she had conceived it to mean before. It was no longer something of her choosing; it was as though the universe chose. Love was not an episode in life; it was life itself. Love was not merely a personal adventure any more than this war was a personal adventure for these men and women who were giving their all to it. It was that, too, but not that alone. When Ben had spoken to her that afternoon in the Kate Greenaway world, she had considered what he said only as it affected such afternoons. But now what he said made her catch her breath way down deep.

She did that when she received her first letter from him. Yet the contents were

matter-of-fact enough, except as she read between the lines. He told her of his journey and tried to picture to her the great aviation-field and these young men who were trying to turn themselves into birds.

"It does something to them," was one sentence. "It gets them off the earth in more ways than one. And that makes you glad you have joined them."

A few weeks ago she would not have known what he meant. But now she knew. Only it was not linen wings alone that took one off the earth.

"*Maman*," said Pauline, "what makes your eyes so bright to-day?"

"Hush," the girl warned.

She wrote him, in return, a matter-of-fact letter, and told him as calmly as she could about Pauline. Then to satisfy the hunger in her heart, she sat down quite by herself and wrote him such a letter as her heart dictated. Only that was not to be sent. She did not tear it up, however, because it seemed so much a part of her, but she put it safely away in her writing-desk.

So for a month every time she heard from him she wrote two letters, one of which she sent and one of which she did not send. It was in the latter that her soul tested itself as those young men in Texas were testing themselves. At first she mounted timidly, intoxicated by the sky-blue world in which she found herself. Then higher and higher she soared, nearer and nearer the sun, until finally she felt quite at ease up there.

Her mother, coming home, scarcely knew her daughter. She was amazed and none too sure of the propriety of this change. But when she spoke of this to her husband, he said only:

"She seems happy, doesn't she?"

"Part of the time very happy, but—"

"Well, we can't expect anything better than that," he decided. "I'd let her alone."

That seemed to be the best she could do, anyway. The subject was altogether too intangible for one who had settled down before airplanes were invented.

WHEN Ben wrote that he would be in New York on the fifteenth of October on a two-weeks furlough before sailing for France, her heart stopped beating a second—then raced furiously as though to make up for the lost beat. So finally

he was going—perhaps forever. He would come to her smiling, with a friendly grip of the hand, and he would leave, smiling, with a friendly grip of the hand. "It isn't much use," he had said, "to hope for anything else." He was a man who gripped his jaws hard on anything he thought right. That was what made him what he was.

The day Millicent received that letter, Pauline clung to her from morning until bedtime, searching her eyes. That night she was restless and in the dark called:

"Maman!"

The girl rose and went in to her and sat by her bed for an hour.

"*Je t'aime*," Pauline told her in a whisper.

"Ah, that is good!" exclaimed Millicent. "Please to love me all you can."

It was good to be loved; it was right to be loved, just as it was good and right to love. Love was like the sun, without which nothing could be. Love was primal—basic. It was something to be fought for like life. Big-eyed, she repeated that to herself. Women had loved, brought forth sons, and given them again for love. It was only so that women could do their share. Love was one then with Liberty. It was one with everything. What a word that was! It was something to be fought for like life.

It was a steadier woman who came down to breakfast the next morning. When Garner came into the room, he paused and exclaimed quite unconsciously:

"Jove, how beautiful you are!"

She smiled without flushing. For the next three days she remained like that, calm and like one inspired. She remained like that when Ben, tanned and thinner, came into the room. But the moment she touched his hand, her face grew hot. He stared at her as at a vision. How superbly wonderful she looked to him! She embodied all those vital things he had dreamed about out there in Texas. He grew uneasy before her, but he held on to himself. He had anticipated this. To see her even to leave her was worth the cost. For two weeks he meant to indulge himself to this extent—and pay. That was all he had a right to do. He had learned something more in camp from the young French officers of what this war meant, and it would not be fair to ask for more. She had before her a long life; once he was across, he had before him only a gambler's chance at every day. So he squared

his shoulders and choked back the words that pressed for utterance.

SHE saw him do that. It was like him. She raised her head, and looked him fair in the eyes.

"Don't," he pleaded. "Don't!"

There was a patter of feet outside, and a child's voice calling her.

"Maman!" shouted Pauline. "Maman!"

The little girl burst in upon them, but at sight of the big man in khaki paused by the silken hangings.

"Come!" said Millicent in French. "This is Doctor Hosmer. You must be good friends."

Pauline sprang forward into her arms, and feeling quite safe there, turned and studied the soldier. Quite as curious as she, the soldier studied her and then the crimson-cheeked girl who held her.

"This is Pauline," Millicent explained.

"What—what was it she called you?" asked Hosmer.

"She—she persists," answered Millicent, lowering her eyes.

But Hosmer was not laughing at her. He stepped nearer.

"Why shouldn't she?" he said.

In the meanwhile Pauline had decided.

"This brave soldier—he is my papa," she said, her eyes growing big.

Stooping, he picked up the little girl and held her in his arms.

"If it were possible!" he choked.

Then Miss Millicent Garner spoke back to the voices she had heard in the dark.

"Is—is it not possible, Ben?" she whispered.

Slowly Hosmer lowered the little girl to the floor. He stooped and whispered in her ear in very, very poor French,

"I want to see your dolls," he said.

"I will get them," nodded Pauline, and ran out of the door.

Left alone, Millicent shrank back. But she could go no farther than the wall.

"You—you mean you will marry me?" he demanded.

"Yes, Ben," she answered.

"Before I go?"

"Oh, Ben!" she cried, throwing out her arms. "As soon as ever you wish!"

He bent over her lips, and she felt herself mounting higher and higher into those dizzy altitudes near the sun. And she was quite unafraid—for she was one with the soldiers now—the soldiers who are the sons of women, the sons of love.



By William R. Lighton and Louis Duryea Lighton

CHAPTER I

A FIGHT had started in the upper end of the log-yard. It could not be seen from the mill shed, but the noise carried. Fights among the hands of the logging-crews were always brutal, rough-and-tumble affairs, with a lot of noise. The high-pitched whine of the big saw and the laboring of the engine under heavy load did not drown the outcry. The men on the skidway dropped their cant-hooks and ran. Two or three others from the shed caught the excitement and quit their work. There were not enough left to keep things clear. Ordway, standing beside the sawyer, gave an impatient signal. The shrill little mill-whistle shrieked; the note of tension in the whirl of machinery fell suddenly to a dull drone as the power was shut off; the driving belt fell slack, stopped. Ordway pulled his watch from his pocket.

"Twenty minutes to six!" he complained to the sawyer. He was less angry than exasperated. To him the ways of these rude woods-folk were past finding out. They were hurrying now as they never hurried at their labor. "Fifteen men beating me out of twenty min-

utes apiece, just to watch a rowdy fight. That's five hours' time I lose. And they won't stand for having it charged up to them."

Bill Hickman, the sawyer, a lank, solemn-visaged man of the backwoods hill country, received the protest dully. His was the most responsible place in the mill-crew, but his sense of responsibility was not a matter of rigid, high-strung standards. No Arkansas hill-man would fret over the loss of twenty minutes' time. Bill could not even sympathize with the mill-owner's nervous irritation. He made no direct response, but stood wiping the sweat from his face, looking out toward the log-yard.

"That'll be Jim Braden and Hen Walker, most like," he said. "They're both of 'em haulin' to-day. If they've met up with each other, now— The Bradens and the Walkers—" There was a mild sort of wistfulness in this surmise. For all his impatience, Ordway laughed. He understood, after a fashion. If this fight was a family affair, then it had importance; among these people family relations and

ADVENTURE and romance go hand in hand in this fine novelette of an Arkansas lumber-camp. You will find here an unusual and most attractive story.

cross-relations were infinitely subtle, drawn in hair-lines. No house of Hapsburg or Stuart ever kept closer check

upon the intricate fabric of allegiances and hostilities.

"Hit's liable to spread, if hit's a Braden and a Walker," Bill said. "There's that thar Rufe Calloway now. He's real liable to git mixed up in it. He's real nasty with a knife, Rufe is."

Ordway was not even remotely interested in the chronicle.

"Go and look at it, if you want to," he said curtly.

LEFT alone, he stood for a moment studying the huge white-oak log lying on the saw-carriage. Only one thick slab had been cut off when the mill stopped. That was not enough to disclose much of the log's quality. He had been anxious to see what the next two-inch cut would reveal. The scaler's figures, scrawled in chalk on the log's smaller end, showed that it held more than four hundred feet of lumber. Both ends were flawless. The day's run had yielded a disappointingly large proportion of low-grade stuff, wind-shaken and wormholed. Ordway, keeping watch, knew that he would do well if he broke even on that output. This last log had promised a marked change in the day's average. With a mill of only ten thousand feet daily capacity, four hundred feet of clear, wide, heavy lumber made a very real difference. As things had been going for the last few months, that difference in a day's run might easily be the difference between a living profit and a profit so small as not to be worth while. Those months had brought him anxiety. At his age, he could not afford to have results deferred. At fifty, after a smashing failure, he was beginning again at the bottom.

And now here was another day of results held in suspense. The log on the carriage, waiting for to-morrow, was merely an aggravation and not a satisfaction. Ordway went out through the shed, with its disorderly piles of fresh-cut, ungraded boards and timbers, to the stack-yard beyond. It was his habit to make his own inspection at the day's end, to guard against carelessness and waste. His hands were a dull-witted lot who would not submit to discipline in their work; those who were not childishly stupid seemed childishly perverse. There was no other explanation of their slackness.

The evening sun of midsummer shone scorching hot upon the narrow tramway

between the high stacks. The air was motionless, stagnant, heavy with the acrid tang of the new-sawn green oak. Ordway's physical discomfort amounted to torment, put him in bad temper, made him more than commonly critical of what he saw. His sense of irritation grew to hot anger as he took account of neglect.

SUDDENLY he paused in his work, turning back toward the shed, hurrying. He had forgotten the fight in the upper yard. That was of no consequence; but he had forgotten, too, that his daughter had promised to walk down to the mill to meet him at quitting-time. The way she would take would bring her past the brawlers. There was no telling what stage the fight might have reached by this time. These hill people did not fight with fair give and take; they fought passionately, savagely, like beasts. Bill Hickman had said that the trouble might spread. Ordway climbed agilely over the skidway and ran up the low incline beyond.

The fight had gone to its finish when he got to the upper ground. Bill had guessed aright. Jim Braden and Hen Walker had met, and some ancient, formless grudge had flared up at the contact. Walker had been worsted; he was still merely a boy—well-grown and lithe, but immature.

Ordway saw the boy lying upon the ground, badly beaten. As there had been no chivalry in the fight, so there was none in the attitude of the onlookers; they were standing by silent, apathetic, offering no aid. Walker had given account of himself in the struggle; Braden's face was blood-stained, marked with discoloring bruises, but the punishment had served only to rouse his temper. Half drunken with the lust of fighting and the lust of victory, he swaggered before the crowd, shouting oaths.

Ordway saw his daughter coming on the hillside above. Braden's obscenity was not for her hearing. Angriily Ordway spoke:

"Stop that! Keep that talk for your own kind."

Braden did not stop; he gave Ordway no heed at all, but turned away to the watchers, calling out to them. Ordway knew that he could do nothing to enforce the order he had given. He had never fought in all his life. He was not a weakling, but he would be merely a plaything in Braden's hands. He did not know what to do.

A man came out from the crowd. He was not one of the mill-hands, but a young farmer from back in the hills. Ordway had known the man's name and had conceived for him a mild sort of liking. That was mostly because Jerome Hamilton was somehow set apart from the other men of the hill country. He was gentler than they, much better featured, with a suggestion of breeding beyond the traditions of the wild neighborhood.

He spoke quietly to Ordway:

"Let me take care of him. I'll get him away."

Quietly he put his arm through Braden's.

"That's enough, Jim," he said. "Your team's gettin' itself in a jam. We'd better look after them, or they'll upset."

Braden's ribald outcry stopped. Dully, protesting a little, he suffered himself to be led away from the scene.

CHAPTER II

KATE ORDWAY met her father with a laugh. That was a way she had in moments of perplexity—to laugh first, and then to face the facts. That un-failing manner had served her well, if it had helped to make her what she was.

"What's happening down there, Dad?" she questioned. "Is that a part of saw-milling?"

Ordway stood below her on the hill path, holding her hands in his, looking up at her, exulting in her. She had been with him, here in his woods camp, for only a little time. He could not get enough of her in the short hours when he could be away from the mill. She was more than refreshment for him; she was tonic, stimulating, exhilarating. The feeling seemed something more profound than that of the relation of father to daughter. Here in the woods he had been all but isolated from people of his own breed, those who could take his attitude toward things, speak in his tongue, see with his vision. Until his daughter came, he had not fully understood how wholly an alien he was in this place. She had given him understanding, a sharpness of realization that was like a shock. Compared with the girls of the hills, she seemed a creature of another race.

That was impressed upon him again in this meeting, as she stood before him in the brightness of the evening sunlight. Though she was very beautiful in his eyes,

with her rare, warm, piquant charm, he knew well enough that it was not physical beauty alone which gave her distinction. Some of the hill girls were beautiful. It was something else which distinguished her—something subtler, better. She was so wondrously, so vividly—that was it! That quality was not exuberance of youth only; it would not pass with the passing of youth. She had never in her life known a moment of stolid dullness; she never would, even when the youth of her body was gone. This glorious life of hers was the life of her spirit. It shone in her clear, deep eyes, so eagerly, vitally alight. It was in every line of her fine, alert poise. Beholding, Ordway laughed aloud in sheer delight.

"I hoped you wouldn't hear that rumpus down yonder," he said. "No, that's not sawmilling, but it's in the game. Sometimes the human equation is the hard part. If there were nothing in sawmilling but cutting lumber— Never mind! I can do my scolding when you're not here. Let's forget it."

HE drew her hand under his arm, holding it fast, fondling it, falling into step with her, and together they climbed the path that led over the hill to the camp. Most of the hands went to their homes at night; but there were half a dozen who must be boarded. It had been Ordway's whim to set the camp-house at a little distance from the mill, so that he might have relief from the unsightly disorder of the yards. He had chosen an uncommonly attractive spot, a nook where ruthless logging had not yet touched the stately timber. The nook was crowded with stalwart oak and gum pine, matted with rank ferns and clambering vines. In the heart of the basin a great spring rose, sending a rush of living water tumbling through a rocky channel to the valley of the river below. The place had the charm of complete seclusion.

The camp-house, a long, roomy structure of rough boards, had a wide-roofed veranda down the full length of the front. Its very roughness put the building in keeping with its setting. The new lumber was still bright; but wild vines, transplanted from the woods, were already covering the veranda posts, running up over the low roof, softening the monotony of color and the crudeness of outline. No great effort had been spent upon these modest effects, but the effects were good. The dooryard was tidy, moreover, kept clean of camp

refuse, in a fashion which men would not observe for themselves. A woman had done this.

At one end of the building was the camp commissary. The mill stood five miles removed from the nearest town on the railroad, and it was necessary to keep the store for the mill-hands' convenience. Next to the commissary was the boarding-house—kitchen and dining-room in one, with tables and benches built from the stock at the mill. Beyond the boarding-room, at the upper end of the building, Ordway had his own room, an airy apartment with large screened windows. He had surrendered his quarters to his daughter upon her coming, making his bed with a cot on the screened-in veranda before her door.

They were the first to appear for supper. The hands would be tardy, lingering over the excitement at the mill. A girl came to the door of the dining-room, looking out. That was Ann Hickman, daughter of Ordway's sawyer, who cooked and kept house. She was strikingly handsome—tall, full-formed, deep-bosomed, with a complexion of exquisite richness. If her charms were obvious, they were none the less compelling. She was not past twenty years; womanly maturity must have been attained early to give this voluptuous completeness of figure and carriage before she was well out of her teens. Ordway had liked her, liked to have her about. She had made things clean and comfortable. He had considered her a good-hearted, simple-minded creature, easy to understand; he had not tried to discover anything more than that in her. Certainly she had been uncommonly tractable, doing her work well.

ORDWAY called out with hearty good will:

"Well, Ann! It's been deadly hot to-day, down below. But it's fine up here."

She gave no definite acknowledgment of the greeting, unless it was with her eyes. Hers were remarkable eyes, very dark, yet not black, very deep, yet with a curious effect of somberness in their depths. Such eyes might go with a moody, uncertain temper; yet Ordway had never seen anything of that trait in her. She was not much given to talking. There was an air of shyness in her slow, reluctant speech, but there was no timidity in her eyes; their gaze was so direct, so steadfast as to be almost disconcerting.

She came to the edge of the veranda, setting her arm against a vine-covered post, letting her sleeve fall back loosely. The lines of her arm were flawless; the skin, above her sun-tanned wrist, showed a soft warmth of texture, a creamy translucence over the firm, vigorous flesh. She was not posing. Ordway had been a little puzzled by her apparent unconsciousness of her attractions, living as she did so much in the company of the mill-hands. His only explanation was that she was still a child, with a child's unspoiled ingenuousness. He had not concerned himself with any deeper analysis.

She gave Ordway a deliberate, unabashed scrutiny, then looked as deliberately at his daughter, standing beside him. She did not smile; she seemed strangely self-possessed; yet Ordway knew instinctively that her attitude of mind was not indifference—that her every faculty was alert. It had not occurred to him before to ask the question; but—was she friendly or hostile? From any sign her manner gave, he could not tell. He made a joke of her intent regard.

"Well, what do you think? Which one of us looks most like the other? I'd like to think I resembled Kate."

Ann delayed her answer for a moment.

"I wasn't thinking about that," she said. "You don't look like each other at all."

Her voice was low-toned, rich, yet oddly unemotional. That seemed incongruous. Was emotion lacking, or only repressed?

"Well, we're feeling pretty much alike, anyway," he said. "We're both desperately hungry. I hope there's plenty of supper."

He made a vigorous toilet at an outdoor bench with cold spring water and soap and a coarse towel, taking great enjoyment in it. At his own end of the house he could have found greater luxury; but he had got out of the way of indulging luxury save upon occasion. For every day, the common resources of the camp were good enough. The abundance of cold water was very comforting. It would give added zest to his appetite for supper.

BY the time he had finished, the mill-hands were straggling in for their turns. Jerome Hamilton, he who had quieted the troublesome Braden, came with them, took his place with them presently at the table. He was quite free to do that if he chose, without invitation; that was custom.

Ordway had his place at the head of the table, with his daughter at his side. The guest's seat was at Ordway's other hand. Ordway observed him with new interest, with a degree of surprise. Hamilton's quiet gentleness was deceptive. It did not stand for timidity. There was no trace of awkward shyness in his manner. The other men, down the table, ate greedily, stolidly, like so many feeding animals. Hamilton's eating betrayed breeding beyond mere studied affectation. Right instinct alone could not have taught that. What Ordway liked still better was the man's admirable self-possession when he was presented to Kate, his fine courtesy in the simple acknowledgment he made, the consideration he showed in not obtruding upon the talk between father and daughter. He would have effaced himself entirely had the girl permitted it; but she too had observed.

"I am in love with your country, Mr. Hamilton," she said to him.

He smiled, letting his eyes dwell upon hers for a moment, speaking with that low-toned gentleness which seemed habitual:

"You make me wish I belonged to this country."

"Oh!" she said. "Why, I thought everybody here belonged—excepting Father and myself."

"You must except me too," he told her. "I'm not quite a stranger here, but this isn't my home."

He did not offer to go beyond that with an explanation. Kate asked no question.

"It doesn't matter whose country it is," she said: "it's beautiful."

"Yes," he agreed simply, "it's very beautiful."

Ann Hickman was not at the table with the men. After the manner of the hill women, she waited as though in attendance, standing apart, though no service was required of her. Ordway had grown used to that, used to seeing her in the background, used to having her in the background of his thoughts. It was not often that he gave her conscious attention at such times. Just now he did, by chance.

She had left her usual post at the farther end of the room and had drawn toward the head of the table. Intently, absorbedly, she was listening, watching. It could not be said of her eyes now that they revealed nothing; they were brilliant with revelation of passionate feeling. She was not

looking at Ordway; she seemed not to be aware of him. She saw only Hamilton and Kate, sitting face to face across the table. As a hungry tigress watches, she watched. There was a tigerish ferocity, quite unmasked, in the drawn lines of her face, grown suddenly colorless under the stress of high excitement. She hung upon every syllable, upon every accent, upon every slightest gesture, yet so covertly that none but Ordway observed.

AFTER a time her eyes met his, read his amused interest. She drew back, catching her hands to her breast, her face flushing darkly in angry resentment. Without a glance aside she went quietly down the room and out of doors. She had given no chance for misunderstanding; she could not have made a fuller disclosure of primitive jealousy. Of whom was she jealous? And why? Ordway's amusement would not permit him to analyze.

He looked for her when he and Kate left the house after supper, but she was not to be seen. The mill-hands, full-fed, were lounging lazily, smoking, indulging a little fitful, listless talk. Hamilton lingered with them, discussing neighborhood news. Ordway took Kate away from the house to a bench beneath the trees where they might be to themselves, free for their intimacies. He had grown fond of that resting place; even before Kate's coming he had resorted to it in the evenings, for the quiet it gave. There was a wonderful outlook down the river, a fine glimpse of the sky where the best of the sunset glow would come. He drew the girl down beside him, clasping her hand in his, sighing his perfect contentment. There was a little time of silence while they let themselves fall into accord with the tranquillity of the hour. There was no particular motive for Ordway's first words; he spoke a chance thought:

"That Hamilton chap is an interesting fellow, isn't he?"

"Is he?" she returned. "I hadn't gone so far as that. But I think he's very nice."

He laughed with easy good humor. "We've been living apart too long. We're not using the same vocabulary. *Nice* is a word I shouldn't want to apply to anybody with man-stuff in him. A nice man! That's not outdoors talk."

She echoed his laugh lightly. He liked to provoke her to laughter, even over

trifles, for the thrill of delight its music gave him; her voice when she laughed held a rich, reedy undertone, a quality almost golden.

"You've become unused to men with manners," she suggested. "I've been seeing so many of them. I couldn't see that he was different from the rest of his kind—the men with manners. I'm not sure but that I'm a little tired of them."

"Well," Ordway returned whimsically, "if he's not different from those who are just like him, at least he's very different from those who don't resemble him at all—those other fellows yonder. They're the chaps who make me tired. There's nothing so deadly tiresome as raw uncouthness when you've got nothing to break the monotony. I might have known that Hamilton isn't a native here. I wish I had a man or two of his sort at the mill, just for variety."

HAMILTON had left the group of loungers at the house and was coming toward the bench beneath the trees. If his manner made him a marked man here, his walk was no less a distinction. He was tall—well above the average height of men, with a strength which was not at once apparent because of his lithe ease of movement. The hill men were ungainly, awkward, as if the stress of the heavy labor of the forest had unfitted them for grace; this man's long, easy stride had a free grace which matched well with his effortless erectness of carriage. He walked like a trained athlete.

Beyond a word of apology, he did not presume upon his table acquaintance with Kate.

"Forgive me, Miss Ordway," he said. "I came over here for a word of business with your father. I couldn't talk business at supper. No, please don't go. There's no secret in what I want to say, and it won't take long enough to let you be bored. I'll go in just a minute." He turned to her father then, speaking directly:

"I have some oak timber I'd like to sell you. None of mine has been cut over at all by the tie-makers or the stave men. It's virgin, and good. You know where my land lies. Perhaps you've seen the timber yourself."

Ordway would have liked to give this encounter a tone of friendliness, but the buying of timber for his mill was hardly a friendly matter.

"Yes, I know where your place is," he said. "I know the timber down there too. The trouble is that the trees on those stony hillsides haven't enough good stuff in them. That black oak is big, but it's very defective. I spent a good bit of money in finding that out."

"That's true," Hamilton agreed. "The timber I'm offering you is good white oak. I have sixty acres of it, up on the level top of Gray Fox Mountain. Those trees will average better than the best you have on your log-yard now."

"Up on top of Gray Fox Mountain," Ordway echoed. "I'm afraid that puts it out of reach. Your farm must be two miles from the mill."

"Two miles and a half," Hamilton corrected, "and then it's another half-mile up the mountain."

"Well!" Ordway said. "There's the difficulty. I can't get loggers who won't balk at those hard hauls. They won't do the work except at a price that eats me up."

Hamilton met that promptly:

"I'll do the logging myself, if you want the logs. Do you want to offer me a price delivered on your yard?"

"Are you sure you know what you're talking about?" Ordway questioned. "Logging off a rough mountain is no joke."

"I'm not joking," Hamilton said.

"But just the same," Ordway cautioned, "there are several things to be considered. There are no roads up Gray Fox Mountain, are there?"

"No," Hamilton said. "I'll build the roads."

"Then there are boggy places between the mill and your farm," Ordway returned. "Those are bad places when it rains."

"There's nothing that can't be corduroyed," Hamilton said.

ORDWAY hesitated. He had his doubts.

Hamilton's apparent assurance was oddly belied by his slow, quiet speech. Ordway had a vague theory that confidence ought to be snappy, high-strung. Hamilton's mood was not aggressive enough to agree with that theory.

"I'll talk plain English," Ordway said. "I don't like to lose money through bad judgment, and I don't enjoy seeing another man lose money so. Here's the proposition; see what you can make out of it. I can pay eight dollars a thousand feet for clear white-oak logs, delivered at

the mill yard. They mustn't be smaller than twelve inches, inside the bark. I give an honest scale. I'll take any length, from ten feet up. If you know quality—" Hamilton interrupted.

"I know. My timber has the quality. I can deliver a hundred thousand feet at that price—maybe twenty-five or thirty thousand feet more."

"That's a bargain, then," Ordway said briefly. "I pay on Saturdays for each week's delivery. Have you your own outfit?"

"I have good mules," Hamilton said. "I'll have to rebuild my wagon for such heavy loads. Jim Braden will help me."

"Braden?" Ordway echoed. The name stirred recollection. "You make an odd choice of your help. Jim Braden is the least dependable of any of the loggers who come to the mill. You seemed to manage him this evening, though. I'm in debt to you for that."

Hamilton answered with his slow smile. Ordway liked the way he smiled, with lips and eyes together.

"Braden isn't manageable, sometimes," Hamilton deprecated. "He has great nerve, though, and incredible strength. That's why I'm using him. He's one of those men who like to be told that a rough piece of work is impossible, and then go and do it. I'll get along with him. Well!" He checked himself abruptly, said a formal good night and went away.

Ordway looked after him with a liking which persisted. Attention quickened when he saw Ann Hickman standing on the camp-house veranda, where Hamilton must pass, as though she waited for him. When he drew near, it was evident that she spoke to him. What she said was inaudible. He did not pause, but quickened his pace a little, calling to her over his shoulder:

"I must go home. There's work to be done before night."

He hurried on. The girl stood where she was, without moving, looking after him intently till he had passed from sight.

CHAPTER III

SUNSET had not yet come, but in the hollow where the camp lay the evening light was mellowed, turned golden. Ordway loved that hour, when peace brooded over his world, when worry

withdrew from him and became as a part of the hovering shadows. In common with most men of his kind he had in him a vein of sentiment. If the crass obligations of life had denied this sentiment indulgence, it had never been crowded out; perhaps it had greater meaning for being undisciplined, wild-winged.

He raised Kate's hand to his lips, caressing her clinging fingers with a kiss.

"I'm glad you're here," he said with fervor. "It's mighty good to have you share this time with me. I'm selfishly dreading to think about your going away."

She stirred, drawing closer to him with a laughing murmur.

"Dad," she said softly, "I haven't told you yet. I think you ought to know. Why isn't this as good a time as any for telling you that I'm not going away at all?"

That was plain enough, but he did not comprehend at once.

"What is it?" he queried. You mean—"

"That's what I mean," she returned. "I mean that I'm going to stay here with you."

"Why, Kate!" he made involuntary protest. The abruptness of the suggestion, no less than its quiet assurance, dismayed him. He did not stop to consider. "Why, that's impossible!" he told her. "It's absolutely impossible!"

"Is it?" she challenged. "Well, then, that's all the better. What was it that Mr. Hamilton said about his logger? 'He likes to be told that a thing is impossible, and then do it.' So do you. So do I."

"It's—it's impossible!" he repeated.

"No, it isn't!" she retorted. "These few days haven't been impossible. I've been happier than you know. Why shouldn't other days like these just keep on being impossible? I want to stay."

He laughed, as at an absurd whim.

"And make this your life?" he rallied. "Live here in the wilderness—with these wild people?"

"With you," she amended. "I've been away from you too long. I need you. We need one another. That other way of living—it isn't fair to either of us."

Uneasy conjecture rose in his mind.

"Have you been unhappy?" he asked.

"No, no!" she protested. "Nothing has gone wrong. Aunt Ellen has been—oh, perfect! I love her. There's been nothing wrong—nothing but being away from you. I don't want to have it that way any longer."

Another surmise came to him.

"You're not being sorry for me, are you? I don't want that. Don't fancy that our bad luck has taken the heart out of me."

She made ardent denial. "Hush, Dad! I couldn't think that. I know you too well. And you mustn't think I'm being merely theatrical—self-sacrificing and all that. It's not that at all. I want you. Living away from you is nothing but a makeshift. I'm tired of it. I want to stay here."

He could not rid himself of his first instant obsession.

"It's impossible!" he reiterated. "Think! This business of mine isn't going yet. The Lord only knows how it's coming out. It's going to be a fight—a hard fight, long drawn out. Win or lose—that's a toss-up. Things are going to be rough. These few days have been fine; but they're not a fair sample of what we get, here in the woods. It's rough. Big—gigantic—but terribly rough too. You don't know!"

"But I want to find out!" she said. Her lively mind veered suddenly; she abandoned argument. "I'll compromise with you," she laughed. "You're not going to tell me I must pack up and go back to Aunt Ellen to-morrow. My visit isn't finished yet. Let's just say I'm going to stay till one or the other of us has had enough. You don't want me to go home now, do you?"

"Kate!" he cried. He put his arm about her slender, yielding young body, holding her close, bending his cheek to touch her soft hair. A warm mist rose to his eyes; warmth filled his heart. He knew that there need be no formality of surrender to her. She would stay until—well, until staying became impossible. He was very willing to compromise so.

He sat erect with an impatient exclamation, scowling.

"Who's that, now?" he said. "Why can't they let us alone?"

A STRANGER had come up the footpath from the mill, pausing where the men lounged before the camp-house, asking direction. He came on lightly toward Ordway's bench, baring his head, sending a greeting with his eyes before he was near enough to speak.

He was dressed for roughing it in the big out-of-doors, with shirt of soft gray flannel, khaki trousers and high laced

boots. His clothing had seen service too; he was travel-stained, dusty; yet he wore this modest garb with an air, and it fitted the lines of his strong body admirably. His head, thickly tangled with curling blond hair, in wind-blown disorder, was carried jauntily upon his muscular, sun-browned neck; his lips, wide and full, fell as though by persistent habit into jocund lines; his eyes were restless, deep blue, shining with whimsical lights.

"Just look!" Ordway made quiet comment. "We're getting all sorts to-day."

The stranger's glance included both father and daughter swiftly, questioning, questing. There was daring in it, oddly coupled with deference—an overture to kindly feeling. He seemed to make up his mind at once.

"I'm intruding," he said, "but I can't help it; so you might as well overlook it, Mr. Ordway. The last house below wouldn't put me up—wouldn't listen to any argument about it. The man of the house sent me on here. He told me you might let me stay overnight for breakfast."

For all the virility of his bearing, his voice was startling—a resonant bass, instinct with strength, well modulated, full of music. There was youth in it, and health, and the assurance of all well-being. Upon impulse Ordway rose from his seat.

"We can manage the breakfast," he said, "but as for keeping you over till breakfast-time—You can see what quarters we have. I'm afraid we can't do better than give you a cot there on the veranda or in the commissary."

"Nothing better!" the stranger laughed. "There is nothing better. I've slept on an ice-floe in the Antarctic, and I've slept in trees in Central America. A cot under a roof—man, man!"

Ordway was frankly curious and frankly attracted.

"What in the world are you doing here?" he asked. "Who are you—if it's fair to ask?"

"Fair enough!" the other said. "My name is Farnsworth. I'm a wanderer—just knocking about. There is no other explanation. I'd never seen anything of this country through here, and so I'm taking a look at it. It's great!"

It was spoken with the utmost simplicity, with boyish candor. Obviously Farnsworth was something more than he professed, more than an irresponsible adventurer. Ordway was puzzled.

"You've chosen a rough way of going," he said. "In these days we're not used to seeing men traveling afoot for pleasure."

Farnsworth made an expressive gesture. "That's why I'm doing it," he smiled. "Not for the sake of being peculiar, but because walking gives so much for so little. It gives me a fine sense of leisure, for one thing. Besides, this way doesn't cost so much. I walk awhile, and then I stop and work awhile at something or other, when I happen to run out of money."

NOT as an afterthought, not because he must, but because it was the natural thing, Ordway turned to Kate. He saw that she was regarding Farnsworth with an interest no less than his own—yes, with something more than his interest. He felt that she was forming judgment, while his judgment was still in abeyance.

"This is my daughter, Mr. Farnsworth," he said simply.

There was no exchange of words. Farnsworth acknowledged presentation with a little air of ceremony—an air of the sort which is called "foreign." It was not an affectation with this man; it became him well.

"Wont you sit down?" Ordway suggested; but Farnsworth took the suggestion as offering the alternative.

"I'll not stay," he said. He laughed lightly, without embarrassment. "I want to talk with you in the morning. I may as well tell you that this is one of the times when my pocket is empty. In the morning I'm going to ask you for work."

"What?" Ordway returned. "At the mill?"

"I stopped to look at your stacks as I came by," Farnsworth said. "I believe I can do you some good. I know something about timber, and about lumber too. I've worked in mahogany forests, and I've worked for buyers of export-oak. It struck me that your men aren't getting as much out of their timber as they might. I'm not an old hand, but I have some ideas I've picked up and worked out. Never mind that now, though; I'll talk with you in the morning."

He left them then at once, with a parting salutation to Kate, and went to join the men.

"All sorts!" Ordway said. "And there's a brand-new sort for this hill-country. I only wish he were in earnest. But it wouldn't do, would it? Imagine his trying

to get along with these chaps! It couldn't be done."

"Another impossibility?" Kate returned. "I was thinking the other way, Dad. I'd have picked him as a man who could get along with anybody."

PRESENTLY there were signs that Kate was in the right about it. Farnsworth seemed to be wasting no time in establishing his footing with the men; his big voice rose full and free; his deep-toned laugh was rollicking in sheer excess of good humor. That was not the way of the hill men, who had an inbred reserve toward all strangers, a profound reticence amounting to positive antagonism. Ordway had never been able to overcome that spirit in his own relations with them. To be sure, he had not tried very hard, but had rather taken the antipathy for granted, even indulging it a little from his side.

But that was not Farnsworth's way. From the first moment he was getting a response. Ordway heard the murmur of other voices. Those voices were listless, slow, dull-toned but not unfriendly. Farnsworth had given them no time for assuming their wonted attitude; he had taken them by storm, routed their distrust before it could awaken. Ordway wondered. If that was merely impudence, it was a sublime sort of impudence. Whatever it was, it worked.

For an hour the talk went on, Farnsworth's booming bass vigorously leading, dominating. Silence came with the darkness. The men kept early hours, night and morning. When they had made their beds, the camp fell into deep stillness. All lights were out; there were only the stars, showing jewel-bright through the high tree-tops. The night air was exquisitely mellow, languid in its movement, heavy-laden with woods odors. From the river valley far below, calls of night-birds sounded, faint and sweet; from somewhere nearer in the big timber came the fantastic note of a small brown owl. The effect of the blended voices was inexpressibly soothing, quieting. The events of the evening, and now the brooding spirit of the deep night in the wilderness, had wrought magically upon Ordway's anxious mind. When he went to bed on his cot outside Kate's window, he was curiously eager for the coming of a new day and its tasks.

"Are you asleep, Kate?" he questioned softly, by and by. "It's nothing—nothing

particular. I just wanted to hear your voice, to be sure you're real."

"Dear Dad!" she murmured. That was real enough.

"I'm glad you're going to stay—for a while," he said. "I suppose I was overfearful. There's no real reason why you shouldn't stay for a while, except that you're likely to find it deadly dull."

"Dull?" She caught up the word with a note of the golden laughter he loved so well. "Dull! There's another word we don't understand alike. Why, I feel as though I were just coming alive!"

CHAPTER IV

ORDWAY'S mood of tranquil satisfaction did not long endure in the stress of the next morning. The mill-whistle sounded its seven-o'clock blast sharply on time; but the signal for starting the engine was delayed. Two of the hands had not yet appeared. One of the two, the off-bearer, who must handle the heavy waste-slabs from the saw to the burning pile, lagged tardily up the road from the river, stopping deliberately to mend a broken boot-lace. He was nearly ten minutes late at his post. The other missing man, one of the pair who handled the logs from the skidway to the saw, rolling them upon the carriage, was not yet in sight. Although that was the usual order of things, Ordway had not been able to overcome its annoyance. Farnsworth stood at his side in the shed; it was to Farnsworth he spoke his irritation:

"Maybe he wont come at all. That's their way. They lay off whenever they feel like it, and they never think of sending word. I'll have to take one of the hands from the stacking."

"Use me," Farnsworth said promptly. "I can handle a cant-hook well enough. It'll let me work while I'm waiting to talk with you by and by."

The first work was hard, for the first half-dozen logs to come were of exceptional size—huge butt-cuts with swollen ends from the tree-base, the stump ends roughly irregular in form. Farnsworth had those ends to manage on the skids. His mate on the ways, spurred to rivalry in matching himself against a stranger, did his best to make the stranger's part difficult. He was admirably expert, admirably deft in his use of the cant-hook; he

knew many sly tricks for throwing or retarding his own end of a log in such wise as to make it appear that the stranger blundered. He practiced all he knew of this trickery. Farnsworth must have had a hard time of it but for his superior strength and endurance. In strength he was incomparably his mate's master; and the other man's juggling, for all its cleverness, put a severe tax upon muscles and lungs.

Once Farnsworth understood what was happening, he set himself to play the game according to the old, old rule of give-and-take. If he could not outdo the hill-man in artful cunning, he could easily outlast him. He tried his own hand at artifice. After half an hour the other was dripping with sweat, grim-lipped, panting. He had beaten himself in setting so swift a pace. When the next log was to be moved, both men braced straining against their hook-handles; then, watching covertly for the right moment, Farnsworth suddenly heaved the log over, using all the power of shoulders and back and legs. Caught unawares, the other man plunged forward headlong, stumbled clumsily and fell, clutching at the timbers of the skidway to save himself from rolling off to the ground. His hat was gone, and he had dropped his cant-hook; he had to climb down to the ground to recover it. When he swung himself back, it was to meet ribald mockery from the shed. He had been made ridiculous in the eyes of his own people.

STANDING at his post by the sawyer in the shed, Ordway had seen; so had Bill Hickman, waiting for the new log; so had the block-setter on the carriage. Ordway laughed; but Hickman never laughed. If Hickman appreciated comedy at all, it was in some obscure, roundabout fashion.

"He hadn't ought to of did that," Bill said stolidly. "Hit aint safe to do a Callo-way that-a-way. That thar Rufe Callo-way, now, he's a plumb mean-dispositioned man when he's crossed. Them Calloways and the Bradens—"

Ordway lost the recital. The belated laborer had appeared at last, relieving Farnsworth. Farnsworth came into the shed, and Ordway walked with him out to the stack-yard beyond. Ordway spoke abruptly:

"Well, what's on your mind? You've made me willing to listen to anything you

want to say. You said last night you thought there's something wrong here. What is it?"

Farnsworth laughed. "Why, what I thought was that the man running this business didn't know very much about saw-milling."

Ordway winced; but he was not seeking offense.

"You're dead right!" he said bluntly. "You've rung the little bell, my friend. I don't know the business, though I've been in it for twenty-five years. I've been head of a big hardwood-milling concern that went on the rocks a couple of years ago, after the war broke. We were exporters. You know what the war did to that trade. Then I started in here alone. I wasn't fit to run a mill. I'd been financier, sales-manager, director—all that. I'd had nothing to do with the manufacturing end. You can imagine where that puts me. The worst of it is that I don't know how to handle the men—these workers. They're strangers to me, and I don't make any headway in getting to know them. There isn't a man in the crew who's on my side. They play horse with me, and I can't help it. They don't know what loyalty to a job means. They're downright hostile, most of them."

Farnsworth made no direct comment.

"You've got some great pine in these woods," he said. "Why don't you drop the oak for a while, and go after this pine?"

"Pine!" Ordway scoffed. "I'm not a pine man. I don't know anything about the pine business."

"I do," Farnsworth told him. "I know enough to help you out. And I know it's the quickest way you have for turning over your money and getting a safe margin out of it. You haven't much money—have you? And you're not making any out of this business now. I can see that. Here's what I've been thinking of, overnight: let me go around through your woods a little and look at your timber. Two or three days, say. Then we'll see if we can't figure out a plan. That won't cost you anything. I'll not be on your pay-roll till you approve my plan and set me to work."

The perplexity and indecision of months was in Ordway's mind.

"Go to it!" he said tersely. "If there's any way out of this mess—I've got to make some money in the next six months, or I'm busted again."

A VOICE called from the log-yard in rude summons:

"Say, come out here!"

That was Jim Braden. Braden's appearance had not improved overnight. His face was lank and narrow, with jutting bones in cheeks and jaw; his nose had been broken at the bridge and given a sidewise cant. The bruises gotten in last night's fight had not been serious hurts, but they showed as ugly discolored blotches; one small, pale-gray eye peered in sinister coldness through purple, puffed lids. He jerked his head at Ordway to emphasize the call he had given. Ordway felt quick resentment. He could not become accustomed to the rough imperiousness of these men; and in particular he disliked Braden.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

"I want you to come out here," Braden repeated. "I fitched some logs that Sam says he wont scale for me."

"Well," Ordway said sharply, "Sam knows his business."

"Come out here!" Braden reiterated. "I aint goin' to let no man do me that-away. You come out here!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort," Ordway retorted. "If Sam wont scale your logs, there's something wrong with them. That's Sam's business. That's what I've got him for."

"I fitched these here logs from my clearin'," Braden said. "The's nothin' the matter with 'em, only a little pin-wormin'. You come out an' look."

Ordway turned his back. Slowly, after a moment, Braden moved away, muttering. At the skidway he spoke to Rufe Calloway. What he said was brief, emphatic. Rufe dropped his cant-hook. Braden called to the block-setter, who swung down from the moving carriage and shambled out of the shed to join the rebels. Braden summoned another man working on the stacks.

Bill Hickman threw his lever, bringing the saw-carriage to a standstill. The man in the engine-pit had seen. He did not wait for orders. The mill stopped. Braden spoke at large:

"The' aint nobody can do me this-away! Ef you-all want to stay, you stay. The Bradens is tol'able many round here. The' aint nobody can do a Braden this-away!"

He moved off with his party. Hickman drew back from the saw, mopping his face upon his shirt-sleeve.

"Now—now!" he said dully. "That's bad! The' aint ary block-setter but Eddy, hyarabouts. Besides from that, ef Jim's aimin' to make trouble—I wouldn't want to be one to get them Bradens riled up. Them Bradens, they aint peaceable when they're riled up."

Curtly Ordway interrupted the droning monologue.

"Quit, if you want to! I'll have no man giving me orders. You're all laid off for to-day. We'll see about this!"

CHAPTER V

THE morning had brought happiness to Kate Ordway. With Kate, happiness was never difficult, never a mood which must be won by striving; but to-day she had a buoyant sense of happiness risen to full tide, flooding her with its completeness.

Here at the camp-house she had not taken the place of an outsider, one to be considered and indulged; she had fallen easily into the camp's life, suiting herself to its hours and its habits. To-day, when the men had gone to the mill after breakfast, she lingered with Ann Hickman in the dining-room, clearing up the chaos of the littered table while Ann was at the dish-washing. There had been no understanding as to the part Kate should bear; she gave her help as Ann accepted it, as a matter of course. From the first there had been no real understanding between the two. Ann's attitude had been undemonstrative, negative; but they had got on well enough.

Over her work, Kate spoke lightly:

"Ann, I'm going to live here with my father after this."

The clatter of the dish-washing stopped, and slowly Ann turned to look over her shoulder. She did not answer at once. Her speech, even about simple things, was always tardy, laborious, as though she took pains to arrange what she would say. It was plain that she was always making deliberate effort to discipline her tongue, to free it from the gross illiteracies and uncouthnesses which made the substance of her father's talk. The reason, Kate had not discovered; the fact was obvious.

"You're going to stay here—all the time?" Ann questioned.

"All the time," Kate said. "That needn't make any difference with your

work. I want to help you. You've done a lot by yourself—those vines, and the cleanness, and the hominess. I want to help you go on with what you've started. I like it. Maybe you'll like it better if you have somebody helping with it."

"Well," Ann said. There was an odd, breathless sound in the word. Kate took it for the shyness which seemed to be a trait of the hill women; it did not occur to her to seek another motive. She talked gayly, making little plans for the days to come, taking Ann's silence merely as an oddity.

The spirit of the summer day out of doors enticed her by and by, and she sat upon the porch before the camp-house, idling, enjoying. She could not get enough of the beauty of the setting in its wild virginity. Save for the intermittent whine of the saw at the mill below, there was no distracting sound; the woods were curiously empty of bird-notes; there was only the forest and its deep silences.

AFTER a time Kate heard the faint sliding of loose stones under a firm footfall. Jerome Hamilton was coming up the trail that led from town by the camp to his own place on Gray Fox Mountain. He was climbing vigorously. Over his shoulder he bore three or four new axes and two long crosscut saws—an awkward burden; yet his movement was free. As he came on, he saw her, knew that she was watching him, and adjusted his load to leave one hand free for a friendly signal. Joining her, he dropped his tools upon the ground, pausing for breath. The path was steep, but the climb had not brought him to exhaustion. Robust strength surged in him, tingling his skin through its brown tan; his eyes were lively as they took account of Kate and of Ann Hickman, standing apart at the far end of the porch.

"Hello, Ann!" he called in friendly fashion, but he stood near to Kate, gave her his attention.

"I'd been saying to myself, coming up the hill, that there ought to be some sort of nymph or sprite, somewhere round; and then I looked up— That's awfully commonplace; but any compliment to you must seem weak and poor."

She was amused, not displeased. Somehow the setting of this meeting did not demand skillful phrasing in a saying like his.

"That bundle of tools looks like work," she said lightly.

"There's work ahead, up here on the mountain," he told her. "I'll start tomorrow, cutting that timber for your father. I'm anxious to get at it."

"Anxious?" she echoed. "I wish I could understand that—being anxious to get at work like that. I can't. It's different from anything I've ever known. All my life I've been used to having everything brought to me finished. I've never seen the beginnings till just now. I've never even thought about the big, rough, hard things men must do in all sorts of far-off places to give us what it's so easy for us to get. A bit of fur, or a pretty feather, or a piece of rare wood built into a card-table—Why, any of that may have meant life or death before it gets to us."

He made no answer, though she saw that he understood.

"I envy you," she said presently. "I'm learning envy here. I'm ready to envy anybody who's capable of doing anything that counts. I've lost all the knack. Even the women here—Why, here's Ann! When Ann hasn't wood enough for her dinner fire, she takes an ax and goes out and cuts it for herself."

She spoke lightly, laughing, turning to include Ann in the talk. The girl's face surprised her; it was deeply flushed, the lips held tight, the eyes full of sullen light. Without a word she turned away and entered the house.

"What have I said?" Kate asked softly. "Did I say anything to offend her?"

HE shook his head, but there was no time for answering. Ordway and Farnsworth came up the path from the mill with some of the mill-hands trailing behind, Hickman and the others. At sight of Kate, Ordway laughed grimly.

"We're in a mess," he said. He told what had happened, not trying to slur the facts. He was outspoken in his angry opinion of the hill people. Ann Hickman came out of the house again, listening.

"It'll take time to straighten things out," Ordway said. "I can't fill those places easily here. There aren't men enough. I'll have to look around. I don't know what I'll do. Hamilton, I'll have to ask you to hold up on that agreement with you for a while, if you will, till I know where I stand. If there's any loss to you, I'll make it good."

Hamilton agreed quietly, readily enough. "I'm disappointed, of course," he said, "but—all right! If it's just Braden, though, maybe I could help you with him."

"No—no!" Ordway interrupted hotly. "It's not Braden; it's the breed. I can't make them out. The only man I'm sure of at all right now is this man here." He laid his hand upon Farnsworth's arm: then, in sudden realization: "Oh! You two haven't met yet—have you? Mr. Hamilton—Mr. Farnsworth."

The two took quick account of one another as their hands met. Neither spoke. Ordway turned sharply to old Bill Hickman.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he demanded. "Are you going to quit? I want to know, right now."

True to habit, old Bill would have temporized. "Them Bradens, now—" he said weakly. Ordway interrupted in hot impatience.

"If you're afraid of the Braden gang, I can't use you. I'm going to have a crew of real men, and I'm going to run this mill of mine in spite of the Bradens and all their kind. Tell them so, if you like. You'd better quit, Bill."

Hickman betrayed no anger; he seemed incapable of any emotion stronger than lethargy.

"Get your things, Ann," he said to his daughter. "We'll be goin'."

THE girl hesitated, looking from one to another. It was to Ordway she spoke:

"Do you want me to go too? You'll need somebody. I'll stay if you want me to."

"Will you?" he questioned a little curtly. "Of course I've got to have a cook. Stay, if you like. Fix it with your father."

"I reckon you'll come along if I say so," old Bill suggested with phlegm; but his voice was not the voice of authority. Ann all but ignored him.

"I'm goin' to stay here," she said to him over her shoulder.

A few of the younger mill-hands remained at the camp-house, whether in resolution or indecision Ordway did not know or care. At dinner he was abstracted, harassed. Even Kate was neglected. With Farnsworth he spent the afternoon in anxious talk, contriving fragments of plans and trying to piece them together. Left to themselves, the hands who had re-

mained were indolent. They seemed to have no way of filling the time; for relaxation they loafed. Even their talk was inert, slack-toned, monotonous, relating to trivial things. Poverty of experience hampered them. They were too listless even to attempt gallantry with Ann Hickman as she went about at her work; and for her part, Ann was sublimely indifferent to them.

Kate found her father more at ease at supper-time, a little freer of his troubled mood. When the meal was done and they were together in their place beneath the trees, he spoke directly:

"Kate, I think you'd better go away. This isn't going to be a place for you. I can't tell you all about it; but there's likely to be trouble. I don't mean this business trouble of mine, but rough trouble—man trouble—the real thing."

She slipped her hand into his.

"You can tell me more than that," she said. "You can trust me farther than that. What is it, Dad?"

He hesitated. "It's a stormy time, girl. Men aren't themselves. What's happened here—it's just a surface sign. We'll have worse things to handle. Things that would stop with quarrels in common times—they won't stop there now. We'll have brutalities. These are strange people. You've seen the listless, dull side of them. They can be passionate too—passionately right and passionately wrong."

She stopped him gently. "Don't, Dad! I've been making up my mind. I don't want to be a child, and I don't want to be a protected woman. I'll go if you order it; but—please don't! I want to stay."

He laughed his appreciation. After a little time he spoke:

"I'm giving you no orders. I know you. You're like your mother. She wouldn't have wanted to be sheltered and shut away from things. I don't know what you can do here. Maybe that's not the point. I guess I know how you feel. But Kate, if you stay, and if things ever come to a showdown, I want you to know there's somebody here you can trust."

She wondered a little at that. "Who is it?" she questioned. "Do you mean Ann Hickman?"

"Ann?" he echoed. "Nonsense! I wasn't thinking of Ann. I mean this man who's with me. I mean Farnsworth. If anything happens, you can trust him if you need."

"Mr. Farnsworth!" She repeated the name curiously. "Why, Dad—"

Her eyes sought Farnsworth, sitting with the loitering mill-hands, talking to them. Somehow his robust humor was quickening the men's habitual temper. For all the narrowness of their experience, they were wise in woodcraft; and scrap by scrap, Farnsworth was getting at their understanding. In return he told them of woodcraft in other lands, of plainscraft, of seacraft, of big, vital things. Kate knew that he was gripping their minds. By and by, suddenly, he began singing.

It was a song of the sea he gave them, an old song of the sailor before the mast, a song of wide, storm-tossed spaces, of struggle and of victory. Heard there in the wilderness dusk, his voice had a robust quality which splendidly dramatized what he sang of. He broke off with a rolling laugh.

"It's a fine world for men to live in!" he cried. "It's as good to-day as it ever was—better than ever, if a man's a man!"

Kate Ordway's hand tightened upon her father's.

"Who is he?" she questioned. "He's more than he pretends to be. Who is he?"

Ordway returned the pressure of her fingers.

"Is he pretending?" he challenged. "How do you know? If he is, then the man he pretends to be is a man to be trusted. Don't forget it, Kate."

CHAPTER VI

MORNING came with thick, gray mist, so dense that at a dozen paces the forms of trees loomed ghostly, magnified by illusion to gigantic size, mist so heavy that it flowed in slow, viscous sheets down the mountain-sides, filling the hollows, lying in warm, stagnant pools. Not a breath of air stirred; there was no suggestion of chill, but an almost tropic sultriness. No rain had fallen, but the ground was wet from contact with the dragging cloud; moisture dripped from the trees and the undergrowths with a continuous soft murmur. Here and there, where the hillsides were bare of woods-mold, tiny rivulets were forming.

One of the hands, taking weather-wise account of the aspect of things, delivered himself of prophecy:

"Hit's liable to lift when the sun gits higher. Or hit's liable not to. A risin' fog in the mornin' means hit'll fair up for a spell. Ef hit don't raise, along in an hour or so, we're real apt to have weather."

When breakfast was over, there was still no sign of change. Ordway sent one of the men to town for mail; the others dawdled. With Farnsworth, Ordway went down to the mill.

"I've made up my mind to go on with the business right here," Ordway said. "When we start again, we'll start right. I'll have to bring in a new crew from outside somewhere. I'll not try to run with these fellows. I'll never be able to get along with 'em. I'll never get used to their style of fighting. It's a cowardly stock."

"You're wrong about that," Farnsworth said simply. "They're not cowards. A cowardly people wouldn't have undertaken the settlement of a country like this. I'm afraid of a coward; I'm not afraid of these men. They've got a great knack of going wrong, but they've got unlimited physical courage."

Ordway would not argue that.

"Have it your own way. But I'm going to leave them out of my crew, if I can find enough men of another sort. When you've had your look over the timber, I'll send you down into the Red River country to see of you can find a crew. I've written to find out what we may do in cutting pine for the Government's needs. Pine or oak, I'm going to run this mill."

CHAPTER VII

BY noon, when Ordway and Farnsworth left the mill for the camp-house, a rising wind from the southwest had blown the fog from the valley, driven it in slow retreat to the heights of the hills. There it hung in ragged masses, dragging sullenly along the ridges, settling of its own inert weight if the wind fell slack for a time. The little change had not allayed the sultry oppressiveness of the morning; the moist earth reeked with heat, and when the sun struck through gaps torn in the mist-bank, its touch was wilting, scalding.

"Rain!" one of the idlers at the camp said. "Hit'll come afore sundown. Hit's been threaten', an' now hit'll come. Hit'll storm too, prob'ly."

Kate was alone in the kitchen. Ann, she said, had gone away after preparing dinner. She had said nothing of her errand, but had promised to return for the after-dinner work. Kate served the meal, making a joke of her unhandiness. It needed her good temper to make the hour tolerable; the room was close, heavy with steaming heat.

Nevertheless, Farnsworth prepared to go into the woods for the afternoon. Kate too made ready for walking, and left the camp with him.

"I'll not go far," she said. "I'll not stop your work. Just down the path to the river. I'll find my way back."

Farnsworth made a good companion with his jocund friendliness, his frank love of the charms of woods-life, his alertness to the intimate trifles which made the sum of wilderness beauty.

Away from the heights, passing into the rough hollows of the hillside, they lost the slight relief of the warm wind's movement. Walls of weather-beaten rock shut them in. There were dense thickets, matted close with masses of luxuriant vines, confining the path they followed to a narrow lane. The earth steamed, and the air was heavy with rank odors. Vigorous movement was exhausting; before long Kate slackened her pace. But physical discomfort could not abate her enjoyment. Out of the rich soil life had sprung abundantly. All around was an inexhaustible wealth of color, a spendthrift, lusty excess of the vitality of growth. Everywhere form was smothered in drapery.

"Oh, wait!" Kate cried suddenly. "I want to look at it. I've never seen anything like this."

For a time she stood looking about in wonder, feeling the mighty spell, her every fiber tingling. It was as if robust vigor flowed into her body and mind in a current under high tension from this battery of life and growth. The sensation was almost overpowering.

"It's like—it's like nothing but being on the sea and feeling the long swells lifting you and carrying you!" she said.

It was the first word between them in the nature of intimate revelation. Farnsworth's lively eyes searched her face attentively.

"If you can feel that," he said, "you're a wise woman. Most women are merely borne along, with their minds on something else."

THE speech was a little cryptic, a challenge to her understanding.

"I wonder if I know just what you mean," she questioned.

"Don't take me for a mystic," he laughed. "I've lived out of doors all my life, in all sorts of places. I've learned a lot that isn't in the books. I've felt what you're feeling. Men have always felt it. They've invented gods for explanation. The great god Pan, and the great god this and that—gods and gods! And men have set them in the heavens and on the high places. But they've been overlooking God, who isn't remote at all. I don't know; maybe that was what you were feeling. Anyway, you weren't imagining it. It was there!"

The declaration did not savor of fanaticism, of mental obsession; it was big, healthy-minded, normal.

"I like that!" Kate said simply; then, quite as frankly: "I think there's another man here in these woods who may be trying to make sure of such things. You met him yesterday at the camp—Mr. Hamilton? He's not one of these people. I can't quite make out why he's here."

Farnsworth was silent. When he spoke, he did not refer to Hamilton.

"I've learned to be fond of men in the mass," he said. "They're pretty good stuff, taking them all together. And then once in a while there's an uncommon one. I've known a few of them. One was a Norwegian sailor, down in the Antarctic. We two had got lost from our ship, out on the ice, and I got my leg broken and had to stop where I was for a while. Neither of us could understand a word of the other's tongue. It didn't matter. He built a shelter for me with ice-blocks. We ran out of everything to eat, but he caught snowbirds and gave me half. He froze his hands and his ears on the job, but he didn't quit. He didn't owe me anything on earth beyond the human obligation, but that was enough for him. He stuck. I liked it. It's easy enough to do heroic things when there's enthusiasm to keep you warmed up to it, but there was something better than enthusiasm in that Norwegian."

He stopped the recital with a deep-toned laugh. Kate spoke the question that had come uppermost in her mind while he talked:

"After all that, what are you doing here in Arkansas? How does it happen?"

He answered lightly, carelessly:

"I don't know. Don't ask for a reasonable explanation. There is none. It's not mere foolishness. I haven't been fooling; I've been adventuring—trying to get to the bottom of things—something like that. But there isn't any bottom, unless it's just the obligation we owe one another. Trying to save ourselves—that isn't salvation."

DESPITE its subject, the talk had not grown overserious. Farnsworth laughed with his habitual ease.

"Talking of the Antarctic," he said, "just feel that coolness! Where does it come from? Wait a minute!"

A breath of chill had touched them. Kate exclaimed at the comfort it gave. It did not pass, but persisted in a steady-flowing air current. Farnsworth pointed.

"Look! There it is!"

They had come opposite a high cliff, somber, weather-grayed, half veiled by heavy undergrowths. In the base of the cliff a cavern-mouth opened, and from the mouth issued a stream of living water and a strong volume of cold air, blown from deep recesses in the mountain's heart. Farnsworth pushed the undergrowth aside eagerly, opening a passage.

"Will you walk in?" he said to the girl. "Let me be host. Come in and refresh yourself."

They sat together upon a moss-grown shelf of stone beneath the jutting shelter of the cavern's roof. There was indeed refreshment there, and something more. Outside was the high ecstasy of life at full tide, gloriously colored, intense; within, in the first rough-walled chamber, was soft gray shadow passing into dim darkness as the cavern opened into deeper spaces. Without was a symphony of life; within was the inarticulate murmur of the flowing water and the sighing of that wind of mystery through remote passages. The contrast was immeasurable. Farnsworth spoke.

"A day means a lot outside there—doesn't it? But not much in here. How long do you suppose it may be since the last man before me sat here and looked at the profile of a woman's face against that hoary old stone? Quite a while! I wonder if he thought her beautiful. Wouldn't you like to know?"

The simple question affected the girl strongly. Her eyes were wide.

"Oh!" she breathed. "What made you think of that?"

"Everything happens over and over again for us," he said. "How else could we learn? See here!"

From the débris upon the cave's floor at her feet he picked a fragment of flint that had been fashioned into an arrow-point by a forgotten hand in a forgotten day.

"There's the man he was! Now do you doubt? Of course it's happened before—over and over again. The man who made this thing, and God knows how many before him, sat right here brooding over their loves and nursing their hates and trying to puzzle it all out. Of course!"

Silence fell then between them, a silence that prolonged itself. Farnsworth was bending over, idly drawing with his fingertip upon the moist earth of the floor.

"Trying to puzzle 'it all out,'" he repeated. "I don't know—maybe—I've been wondering if the end of the tough old puzzle isn't coming pretty soon. The war sifted things out for us. We'd been getting halfway answers before; maybe we'll get it straight now. It's a showdown. Love and hate, and good and bad—it's all on the table now."

KATE did not try to answer. By and by she stirred in her place. Her glance had caught the movement of a figure in the undergrowth across the hollow, on the flank of Gray Fox Mountain. There was a fleck of color. After a moment Kate saw Ann Hickman. She was not following a path, but descending the rough slope over hard footing on loose stone, moving hurriedly, supporting herself as she could. Farnsworth too had seen. He watched silently, idly curious, till Ann had found the path leading through the hollow to the camp above, watched till she disappeared.

"What's she doing?" he questioned. "She's taking it hard, a day like this. What's she doing that for?"

The question repeated itself in Kate's mind.

"There's no one living on the mountain," she said, "no one but—"

She caught her lip between her teeth, stopping the word upon her tongue—Jerome Hamilton's name. Not consciously, involuntarily, her memory flashed an association of Ann's name with Hamilton's, as she had seen the two about the camp. Hamilton's bearing had been casual

enough, but not Ann's. Kate would not indulge the thought. She rose from her seat upon the ledge. Farnsworth too stood up, giving her his hand over the stones.

They walked slowly through the heavy timber of the bottom lands, while Farnsworth took account of it for milling. There was not much talk. Kate was becoming listless. The heat of the afternoon had settled into an almost tangible weight. By and by Kate paused, speaking with an effort:

"I'm afraid I've been foolish in coming so far. I ought to have remembered that I'm not used to this. I shall have to rest here."

Farnsworth's solicitude was gentle. Somewhere near by he found cold water and brought some to her, to let her bathe her flushed face. There was concern in his voice.

"Does that help? It's I who have been foolish. I was looking at these trees. We'll start back when you're able. It's not very far, after all."

SHADOW 'fell upon the forest all at once, startling in its suddenness; under the pall of shadow the pulse of life seemed to stop. On the earth was dead silence; there was no movement of a leaf, no faintest far-off stir. Over the high tree-tops swept a cloud-mass, black, yet shot through with sullen shadings of color. The hush was profound.

Then, from far in the southwest, came a slow throb of sound. It fell, and rose again with volume. To Kate it meant nothing; but Farnsworth stood erect, listening intently. This time the sound did not drop back into silence; it strengthened, deepened. Though it was at a great distance, it seemed vast, menacing.

"If you can, we'd better start back," Farnsworth said. "I shouldn't like to be caught here. These big trees— We ought to get up among the rocks if we can. Here, give me your hand."

The shadows became deep dusk; yet the dusk was livid. The storm had abandoned stealth for a frenzied outburst, a furious onrush. The trees shuddered, bent far over and flung back in writhing rebound. Great branches were torn free. The storm's voices became a mighty, thunderous roll. The air was filled with flying wreckage. The slenderer trees bent low, lashing the earth, struggling impotently.

The dusk fell into black darkness, and through the darkness flashed the white terror of the lightning in crashing volleys.

Kate stumbled as she ran, falling to her knees. Stooping, Farnsworth caught her up in his arms and ran with her, using all his strength. Terrified, she hid her face upon his shoulder, clinging close to him till he put her down in the shelter of the cavern chamber.

There was safety; outside was chaos. In such fright as she had never known before, Kate crouched upon the cave's floor, hiding her face upon her knees, covering her ears.

It was not long before the madness of the tornado passed. When Kate dared to raise her eyes, beating torrents of rain drove before the cave-mouth, blotting out everything. Forest and mountains reverberated to the magnificent wild dissonances of rushing wind and beating deluge and full-volumed thunder. At the entrance Farnsworth stood facing the storm, glorying in it. Kate went toward him. When he saw her, he laughed aloud, exulting.

"Look at it!" he cried. "Oh, hear it! There's something with all the petty weakness left out of it."

CHAPTER VIII

THE path of the storm's vortex had barely touched Ordway's uncut timber. Quick report said that across the river and farther down the valley the destruction had been great. The loss would fall hard, for the timber had been the Cove people's one sure defense against privation. In extremity, the man who owned good trees might always serve an urgent need by hauling from the forest a load of ties or a cord of stave-bolts. The timber did not represent hoarded riches whose loss was grudged; it was an indispensable resource.

Evening after the storm brought straggling visitors to the camp from up and down the wide neighborhood; in the backwoods the sawmill camps make the meeting places, the centers of news. Men came from the mountains and from the Cove and the lowlands of the valley. Little by little the extent of the devastation was fixed.

The Bradens were valley-folk. Loss had fallen heavily upon them and their clansmen. Theirs had been the choicest

holdings of all the region's timber; possession had meant more than possession; it had spelled a sort of aristocracy, given them a social eminence. If the wealth had never been turned to account, at least it was there. And now, between morning and night, the Bradens had been reduced to poverty as abject as any man's on the rocky hillsides.

Jim Braden, chief of the clan, was showing a fierce, wordless resentment as he met his neighbors at the camp. He knew he had little of their sympathy—that they were exulting rather than sorrowing. He had played his chieftainship with a hard hand, not in a fashion to insure consideration if fortune should ever go against the Bradens. And now the Walker tribe, hill people, would have that ascendancy which possessions give. Jim Braden brooded. Watching, Ordway only half understood the man's savage temper; still less did he understand how easily that sullen repression might flame into passionate action under any trivial impulse.

Somebody had kindled an outdoor fire, for these people were not used to gathering under roofs. Around the fire the visitors came and went, contributing their news, discussing it dully. It was all listless, as if catastrophe were a mere commonplace for these folk—as if they were unable to give to it any dramatic value. They talked, not of the tornado, but of the ruin it had wrought.

One of the younger men, a stranger to the camp, come from far back in the hills, spoke presently with the characteristic lack of emotion:

"Hit don't make such a sight o' difference. Not fer me, hit don't. They've done passed me fer camp. I got to go to Little Rock in a couple weeks. My woman, she's goin' to her folks. The timber, hit mout as well go too."

The suggestion made a little stir in the group. The draft was already touching some of these men intimately, hovering vaguely over others. They did not understand; not understanding, they were instinctively hostile. With some, not much was needed to quicken an active antagonism. This was not the right moment for suggesting an obligation which they saw as remote, none of theirs. Farnsworth, sitting beside the fire, was aware of sudden tension, of the half-furtive exchange of glances. He spoke lightly:

"It's all in the game, boys. If we knew

how the game's coming out, there'd be no more fun in playing it."

Jim Braden's embittered mind caught at the jocund speech. He retorted with a flare of heat:

"The game's for them that's playin' it. We-all haint got no hand in it."

Farnsworth laughed.

"You're wrong there, Braden. Every man on earth has a hand in this game now. That's the beauty of it."

"We-all haint got no hand in it," Braden persisted. "Hit haint our doin', no more than this here whirlwind. Hit haint goin' to make us nothin', no more than the whirlwind. Them that makes is them that's fixed to take advantage. Ordway—this here whirlwind haint goin' to hurt him none. He's figurin' right now on gettin' the downed timber cheap, because he figures we-all got to sell before the trees is ruint on the ground."

He spoke to Farnsworth, but the speech was directed at Ordway, standing by. Ordway spoke offhand.

"Don't be uneasy. I'll buy no timber of you or yours."

Braden's temper kindled.

"You're plumb right you wont! Not from me nor mine! We-all will sell to them that's friendly. Hamilton's mill, hit'll be runnin' in these woods a plumb long while after you've done quit."

"Hamilton!" Ordway spoke the name with sharp surprise. "Hamilton's mill?"

Braden's sinister face leered.

"You-all been figurin' things too much your own way," he taunted. "You-all are goin' to find out somethin'. An' the Gov'ment, hit's goin' to find out somethin'. The' haint ary Braden that's goin' to be driv'."

"Faugh!" Ordway retorted with strong distaste. "You Bradens will stand with all the rest of us. Don't make any idiotic mistake about that. What's more, I'll have no man talk here as you're talking."

Braden stood up slowly. Ordway's speech was a challenge, not to argument, but to the man's fighting instincts. He took a step forward.

"What would you-all be aimin' to do about it?" he demanded.

"Do?" Ordway flashed. "I'd do what any good American would do. I'd give the Government all the help I could in dogging you and your tribe into the penitentiaries. The penitentiaries are waiting wide open for such as you."

Snarling, Braden leaped. This admitted of only one settlement. He struck, and Ordway fell heavily. Braden drew a knife. There would be no chivalry in this fighting, no rule but to finish it quickly, as an enraged animal would. Farnsworth caught the man about the body, pinioning his arms to his sides, holding him fast, struggling with him. Braden lost his knife. The advantage was with Farnsworth, since he was at Braden's back. They wrestled and fell. None of the other men moved to interfere till Farnsworth called:

"Here—help me—some of you! We don't want trouble. Take care of him!"

Some of the younger men gave help then. Braden was led away, storming. The men about the fire were dispersing. Farnsworth brushed the dirt from Ordway's clothing, stopped the flow of blood from a cut upon his cheek. No great harm had been done. Though he was shaken, Ordway spoke quietly:

"It's the first time I've been struck since I was a boy. I don't know; maybe it was coming to me."

"I suppose Braden thought so," Farnsworth laughed. "Anyway, it'll be give and take now. He'll have it in for you."

Ordway's mind veered. "Did you hear what he said about Hamilton? What did you make out of that?"

"I don't know," Farnsworth said briefly. "We'll find out."

Ann Hickman stood upon the porch of the house, a little way off, observing, listening. She spoke a quiet question:

"Can I do anything, Mr. Ordway?"

"No—no!" he said. "I'm all right. I hope Kate's asleep and hasn't heard the row. Don't say anything to her, Ann, about this thing. She'd be frightened."

FARNSWORTH slept indifferently and awoke in the first half-dawn. No one was yet astir about the camp. Restless, he dressed and left the nook. Not with clear intention, obeying formless impulse, he followed the path he had taken yesterday before the storm, down through the rock-walled hollow toward the river. Though the air of dawn was cool, by and by he felt the colder breath from the cave's mouth and turned aside from the trail toward the hidden entrance—then stopped short.

Far within the cavern, around a turn in the sinuous passage, a flickering ruddy light

shone. Listening, Farnsworth heard faint footfalls; the light was drawing nearer. "He drew back into the shelter of the dense undergrowth, waiting, watching.

It was Ann Hickman who came to the cavern's mouth, bearing a smoking pine-knot torch. She was bedraggled, disheveled; in the confused light of dawn and the torch's flare her face appeared drawn, weary, frightened. Jerome Hamilton followed her out of the passage, joined her in the shelter of the chamber's entrance, took the torch from her hand.

"You'd better hurry," he urged. "It's toward morning. They'll be missing you before long. Do you think you could find your way back, with a light?"

"Yes," she said. Distraught, she looked at her disordered dress, wet with the cave-drip. "I've torn my sleeve out. I'll have to get back in time to change my clothes before anybody's up."

Hamilton detained her, grasping her sleeveless forearm.

"You're not afraid?" he questioned, and laughed when she shook her head. "You're an uncommon woman! Not many women would dare, even for their own people."

She looked at him intently, striving for words.

"I aint doin' it for—them," she said. "I aint doin' it for anybody but—you."

She left him then, abruptly, hurrying. After a moment he turned back into the cavern, holding his torch aloft, walking with the assurance of familiarity.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER breakfast Ordway and Farnsworth were together at the mill, planning changes in the machinery which might be necessary if they were to cut pine instead of oak. The talk was matter of fact. It seemed in quite a matter-of-fact way that Farnsworth asked presently:

"What about this fellow Hamilton? Is he able to start milling on his own account? Who is he, anyway?"

Ordway seemed not much perturbed.

"I don't know anything about him. He's been here only a little while. Braden was exaggerating. Every once in a while somebody sets up a toy sawmill somewhere in the woods and runs it till his money's gone. It's nothing."

Presently Hamilton himself came down

the path from the camp. Farnsworth spoke then sharply:

"Ordway, keep that man here for a while—as long as you can—till I get back, if it's possible. I can't tell you why now—but keep him!"

Safely away from the mill, in the concealment of the woods, he set off with all speed for the summit of Gray Fox Mountain. There was no token of human life anywhere till he reached the mountain's crest, where Hamilton's house stood in an acre or two of new clearing.

The house was a mere cabin of two rooms, log-walled, mud-chinked, roofed with riven oak "shakes." Mountain-fashion, the door was unlocked. Farnsworth entered hurriedly. Within was the simplicity of orderly bachelor housekeeping. The furnishings were very few, very plain. Farnsworth's scrutiny was swift but thorough. Hamilton's trunk, standing unfastened, held nothing but clothing. A few books filled a small shelf beside the chimney,—the cabin's only distinction,—queerly assorted literary odds and ends. In the kitchen room was an open fireplace, an open cupboard, a bare table and a chair. If Hamilton had a secret, the house gave no clue to it.

In the dooryard were the footpaths of common use. One led to a rude stable of poles and thatching, the other to a sort of storeroom built under a shelf of rock, shored and floored with rough planking. It contained nothing but a sack of potatoes and a sack or two of grain.

The place was gratefully cool. It was a little time before that occurred to Farnsworth, to impress him, before he felt that a cool draft was flowing steadily outward, chilling his heated body. Curious, he examined the planking in the walls. It needed a little patience to discover that two or three of the planks in the rear wall were movable, might be dropped like the bars in an old-fashioned rail-gate. When he had moved them aside, he looked into a cavern descending into the mountain.

He felt hurried, and he had no light save a few matches. These sufficed to show him a rude stairway leading downward, built of plank set in a frame of logs. With the guidance of his matches he groped his way down. The steps were wet with the drip from above, slippery, but the descent was not long. At the bottom the floor of the cave sloped evenly away, the depth of the chamber impenetrable to his eyes.

He stood conjecturing. As if in answer to the question shaped in his mind, the light of his last match showed him a ragged bit of blue gingham caught upon a roughness or a nail in the log framing of the stairway. He knew what it was; it was the sleeve torn from Ann Hickman's dress.

He let it stay where it was, ascended the steps and crawled through the opening, setting the planks carefully back into place.

CHAPTER X

FARNSWORTH had shown genius of a sort in gathering together the new mill-crew. They were not Cove people; he had picked them up in the lower country. If they were oddly assorted, they gave Ordway an unaccustomed sense of confidence as they assembled at the mill for their first day's work. Tom Phelan, the new sawyer, for all his red bulk and his fifty years, had the deftness and precision of a man who knew every nicety of the work in hand. His very speech, brusque to the point of rudeness, was comforting after Bill Hickman's indecisive stammerings. He knew the mechanism under his hand; he knew logs too. A good log he held in high esteem, as something worth a man's while; against a bad log brought to his carriage he held something like a grudge.

The mill would clean up the oak lying on the log-yard before turning to pine. That would need two or three days. Already woodsmen and logging crews, brought in from below, were at work in the pine timber. After months of doubt, reassurance had come to Ordway. In his desk were bills of material for the new needs of the national army. He would be dealing with Government now, and not with that unstable thing the lumber-market. His work would be something more than industry; it would be service.

Doubt was forgotten on that first morning when he stood beside Phelan, watching the Irishman's big hand signaling the adjustment of the first log under the blocks. What he said was more to himself than to Ordway:

"She's a beauty, that wan! I'm right proud of that wan, now! I'll get three hundred feet of good, clean three-inch flitches out of that beauty, so I will! An' a good, sound, heart-timber left besides."

For an hour the work went forward

without an instant's check, smoothly, at high speed. It chanced that the first half-dozen logs on the skidway were of quality; the lumber left the carriage and moved through the trimmers and down the shed to the stackers' tramway almost without a flaw. Ordway's spirits rose. After a time he went out to the end of the shed to join Farnsworth at the grader's post.

"That's the way to run a sawmill!" he cried. "It's a long time since we've had an hour's run like that. If we can only keep that up!"

Farnsworth looked with a good workman's pride at the wide, clear piece he was chalking with the grader's hieroglyph.

"Fine!" he said. "It's a good crew. And when we get to the pine, we'll have fifty per cent more speed. We'll do all right now."

Ordway went back to the saw. Phelan was chuckling his approval of still another handsome piece of timber just rolled into place.

"See, now! Every bit good enough for quarterin', Misther Ordway, if ye was cuttin' the quartered shtuff. She'd open up with a grand figure; ye can tell by the look o' the butt, an' the full length of her bein' without a bit of a twist at all. A good log!"

He threw the lever adroitly nursing the carriage forward, and smoothly the flying saw caught the end of the log thrust upon it, crying out as the sudden resistance checked its high speed, then steadying to its work. . . . One moment, there was no remote hint of catastrophe; another moment, and the catastrophe had fallen and passed.

The great saw, buried deep, screamed like a living thing in agony, spun wildly in jerking shocks, jarred to a standstill, then whirled in mad impotence. From the heart of the log shot a blinding burst of white flame. Flying fragments of broken steel were flung down the length of the shed, singing viciously; other fragments tore ragged gaps through the roof. Voices cried shrilly in panic fright. On the instant, Phelan threw the lever to reverse, dragging back the carriage; power was shut off in the engine-pit. Then came profound silence, the silence of stunned terror. Phelan was the first to find tongue; he swore angrily, passionately, his broad face purpling.

"Look, now! The man that did that—throat-cuttin' would be too good for him!"

The saw was wrecked, stripped clean of teeth, blistered, warped, with a jagged piece torn from one side. Phelan knelt, bending close, cursing with fresh zest as he pulled away strips of loosened bark, beckoning Ordway. A row of heavy spikes had been driven into the log, their heads clipped off, their bodies forced deep for concealment.

"They're new nails," Phelan said. "They've not been there long. Oak sap in a green log rusts a nail quick. These are clean yet."

Ordway stood up, calling sharply: "Is anyone hurt?"

They found the block-setter lying back of the saw-rig, in the narrow space between the carriage and the mill wall. Blood was spurting from a severed artery at the base of his neck. He died before he could be lifted out upon the shed floor.

In the face of the tragedy it was not sorrow but red rage that possessed Ordway's mind and heart.

"Is that what we've got to fight?" he cried. "Deliberately done! Murder! It's in the brutal breed! If that's what they want—"

Farnsworth laid his strong hand upon Ordway's shoulder.

"Wait!" he said. "This is too big a thing to be met so. Wait!"

CHAPTER XI

FOR the week that followed the tornado Kate Ordway kept to her room, with only Ann Hickman for company. The experience had affected her profoundly; the extreme of physical fear and the high tension of excitement had brought a reaction of great depression. She could not fight it off at once, though she tried to make light of it to her father. With Ann she was more honest.

"It angers me to be like this," she said once. "I'm not a silly weakling, but I'm acting like one. Ann, where do you get your strength?"

The girl had been busying herself about the room, quietly, capably, saying little in response to Kate's overtures. The question surprised her into attention; her dark eyes were intent.

"Strength?" she echoed. "What makes you think I'm strong?"

It was simply said, but Kate caught the tense undertone.

"Why," she said, "everything about you—the things you do, and the way you live here—everything. You're not afraid. Fear couldn't do for you what it's done for me."

Ann stood silent for a moment. When she spoke, it was with difficulty, slowly, as if the choice of words was awkward.

"I aint—I'm not afraid of wild-storms. I'm not afraid to be out in the timber in the dark by myself. Such things as that don't make me afraid. But—if a woman like me don't know what's right to do, she aint very strong."

There was no betrayal of any emotion. She spoke with a manner of repression; yet Kate knew there was deep feeling beneath that calm.

"What do you mean, Ann?" she asked gently.

Ann could not say readily.

"Oh—I don't know. If it was just choosing for myself, or for somebody I know right well, like I know Pap or my own folks, so I'd know how they're thinkin'— Men aint as honest as women, are they? Do you think they aim to be? They mix things up so."

It was the first time the girl had spoken to Kate save about the commonplaces of the camp. This was revelation, vague enough but wholly sincere. Kate was obliged to answer a little at random till the disclosure would be made more intimate.

"Yes, I suppose we must know a man pretty well before we can be really sure how honest he is."

"They tell us a part of what they're thinkin'," Ann said steadily. "They tell us just as much as they want to, and they hold the rest back. It aint fair!"

THERE was nothing Kate could say to that. She waited a little curiously. It occurred to her that Ann was trying to ask her help in perplexity; but she did not quite know how to prompt.

"I don't see why people can't be just plain honest," the girl said by and by. "It seems as if men ought to be with women, anyway. But they don't seem to think that way—not when they're tryin' to use a woman. Mebbe they know they aint foolin' us very bad; but they know we're fools enough ourselves so they don't need to have us plumb deceived. We're willin' to help 'em fool us. It's mixed up!"

Still, the moment seemed not at hand

for a direct question from Kate. She wondered if Ann intended to be more personal.

"Your father," Ann said quietly, "—your father's a good man. He's honest."

That was concrete enough. Kate smiled, spoke happily:

"If you have found out that, you can't say you're not a good judge of men. My father is just that, Ann—honest, and good."

"If everybody was like him!" Ann suggested. "I guess he don't care much for me, but I'd do anything I could for him. I guess he would for me too, if I was ever in trouble."

Kate's thoughts were alert. Was this the definite question Ann wanted to ask?

"Indeed he would!" Kate cried. "Giving help to people who really need it—why, that's his religion. You can trust my father, Ann."

It seemed that Ann had finished what she had to say.

"I—don't know," she breathed. "I don't know what's been makin' me talk like this, unless it was what you said about me bein' strong. I don't feel like I was so very strong. I can work like a man. They can't terrify me that way, not by what they give me to do. But I expect they could make a fool out of me. If I was a man, they couldn't do it. I expect it's just the woman in me."

Kate laughed at this quaint presentment of the age-old puzzle; then, because the moment was friendly, she talked a little about what womanhood meant in the world outside Ann's. She spoke, not as a zealot, not as an advocate, but as a woman whose own experience with life had been normal, happy, free of all bitterness. In particular she told of the strong new comradeship come to men and women under the stress of war's vast obligations. She had seen and felt something of that; she made the story very human. Ann listened in silence, but her eyes were wide, her tanned cheeks tinged with unwonted color.

"It wont ever happen like that here," she said at last. That was her only comment, for a time. She went on with her task of putting the room in order, speaking no further word till the work was finished. Then she summed up her thinking simply:

"I guess a woman don't deserve no better than what she gets till she's willin' to do for herself what's right, just the way she sees it. But it's terrible hard."

BEFORE the week was done, the camp had a sort of festival night. For one thing, Kate was in her place again at the table, light-hearted, full of gay humors. For another thing, the mill had made its first day's run on the new pine-contracts. Ordway was delighted. His crew had got itself into first-rate working order, and the pine logs had developed an unexpectedly high grade. The workers were not taking the day's outcome stolidly, in the manner of the old crew; from Phelan to the boy who tended the refuse-fire, they were in fine spirits, ready-tongued, irrepressible.

Jerome Hamilton had the guest's seat at Ordway's side, across from Kate's place. Chance, he said, had brought him through the camp at this hour, on his way home after an errand to town. He had been at no great pains to establish the footing of social privilege in these later days; his calls had been casual, little friendly asides from the day's work. But no man needed to calculate his standing at meal-time in a region where an unlocked door was the inviolable rule.

Now that he was here, he was making the most of it, matching his humor to Kate's, bearing his part deftly, with a knack which suggested native instinct rather than discipline. The talk ran upon trifles for the most part, but its tone was not to his disadvantage.

"Have you been told," he questioned once, "that I am becoming a business rival of your father's?" And at her nod of assent: "Sooner or later, they say, every newcomer in Arkansas takes his turn at owning a sawmill. If you make it win, you lose caste. To keep in good standing, you have to fail. Your father seems to think my standing with my neighbors is safe enough."

"Safe enough!" Ordway echoed. "Safe enough, on those terms. Running a sawmill, my young friend, is no joke. It lacks several of the essentials of a good joke. There's not a bit of fun in it, for instance."

"What's that you say?" From the lower end of the table Tom Phelan's hearty voice sounded a challenge. "Are you sayin', now, that there's no fun in sawmillin'? Man, if it wasn't for the fun in it, I'd be out of it. Yes, I would!" He grimaced at Farnsworth, over the table,

and swept the oddly assorted company with a swift, appraising glance. "He says there's no fun in sawmillin'! He can look at this bunch an' say there's nothin' funny about sawmillin'!" He spoke then with an odd earnestness in the tone of jesting:

"Sawmillin' is like everything else in the world. If a man don't think about nothin' but makin' boards, there's nothin' in it but just boards—an' boards can get awful tedious. But sawmillin' starts away back o' that. There's the logs to think about. Rippin' up a log, however, comes handiest—that's wan way. An' then you can take your log an' study it first, an' then keep watchin' it an' turnin' it round an' nursin' it. It's a poor log that you can't get nothin' good out of, if you'll take trouble with it. A log's like a man, that way: You'll never get all the good that's in him just by tearin' at him careless. The best man livin' needs turnin' over an' over and a lot o' nursin' to get all the best out of him. Aint that so, now?"

Again he appealed to Farnsworth. Between the two, so opposite in particulars, there had developed a robust liking which struck deep below the surface. For all their disparity, they were of one stock; for all the difference in experience, they could meet—had met from the first—upon common ground of understanding of the man's part.

FARNSWORTH had been taking but small part in the table-talk, attending to his supper with sturdy appetite. Phelan's saying caught his attention.

"You're right!" he smiled. "That's the living truth, Phelan! That's what I like about the big scheme of things—savin' the good, and trying to make sure that nothing but the worthless goes into the burning-pile. That's the end that makes it all worth while."

Phelan, full-fed, pushed back his plate, making a place for squaring his heavy arms upon the table before him. That was a way he had at these times, when he wanted to indulge talk out of the ordinary.

"It's so now!" he declared. "That's the only business a man has got in this world at all—savin' what's worth savin' an' passin' it along. My soul! Aint we seein' it now, good an' plenty? Red war! It's terrible! I guess I know! I've let my three boys go. It's all I had but meself. They wouldn't take me. I'm not the kind,

says they, to make a fighter out of. Look at me! Two hundred pounds, an' a good fight in every ounce of it—but I'm fifty-two. An' so I said Godspeed to the boys, an' here I am—cuttin' boards. It's har-rd! But no matter! It's not what happens to one or the other of us that counts now; it's the big thing—savin' what's worth savin' out of all that's in the world. An' what is it? It's no manner o' wonder that there's some that can't see it, for it's nothin' you can stack up before their eyes, like boards, an' count the worth of. It's not that. I don't know what it is. I can't tell. It's somethin' we'll be seein' in our boys that comes back. That's where I'll be lookin' for it—in my boys—if they come back. They'll be men!"

He was not speaking as an oracle. He spoke with conviction yet with humility too, in that mood which is possessing strong men in these days. What he said did not invite argument; none took issue with him, for mere argument's sake, as men are quick to do in common times. Phelan laughed.

"These folks here, now," he said. "I wonder what's the trouble with them. I've been hearin' some of them are fightin' to get out o' goin'. There's sure a world o' difference in men."

Farnsworth interposed quietly:

"Don't be too hard on these folks for that, Phelan. Think what they are. Think what life's been doing to them. They've had nothing but raw hardship since the beginning. Hardship makes their whole history. It's put them on the defensive; they've had to fight on the defensive always. They've never known anything but that. Besides, they've been shut away behind a wall of ignorance of all that's been happening in the world outside their own. But they come of fine old fighting stock, for all that. Let them understand, and we'll save a lot of them."

Phelan shook his head, uncomprehending.

"I don't get 'em at all. It's past me that any man with life in him can be as blind as that."

CHANCE let Kate glance just then at Ann Hickman. As always, the girl stood apart, serving the table; but now service seemed forgotten. The somber eyes were flaming; her lips were parted breathlessly; in every line of her strong body was passionate feeling—wonder,

doubt, pain, hunger for fuller understanding. She had hung upon every word; but Kate saw that the blazing eyes were fixed upon Ordway, sitting silent. He was giving no heed to Ann; he spoke with no conception of what his words might mean to her.

"Maybe Farnsworth is right about these people," he said. "I don't pretend to know them. But I do know this: It's true for all men in all times, no matter what they are or what they've been. The only way under God to let a man know what the man's obligation is and what it means, is to require him to stand up to it. There is no other way. There never has been, and there never will be."

Watching quietly, Kate saw Ann Hickman's attitude suddenly relaxed, as if that simple saying from one whose honesty she believed in had given what she sought. Abruptly she turned and left the room.

It was chance again that brought Kate a brief meeting with Farnsworth in the hour after supper when they were out of doors. It was she who gave the meeting its turn away from mere pleasantries.

"I liked the talk at the table," she said directly. "Something great is bound to come of it, when men are thinking such things and saying such things to one another."

"Yes," he agreed, "something is bound to come of it."

By and by, without clear intention, she spoke an intimate word:

"After all, the obligation is greatest for those who have seen it clearly. Men like you—I suppose you will be going."

He did not answer at once. He was looking at her steadily.

"I've wondered," he said, "if that would occur to you. I've wondered if you would think it worth while to speak of it. I hoped you would. If you've thought of it at all, maybe you've been trying to imagine why I'm not over there now. Would you like to know? May I tell you?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"It's a harmless little secret," he told her. "I'd like you to let it be a secret from the men here—will you? I don't want them to know—not yet. It's— Well, look here!"

From his pocket he brought a small case and gave it into her hand. At his word she opened it. Within was the French war cross.

"Oh!" Kate breathed. "Oh!" Startled,

she raised her eyes to his. "You! But I might have known! Men like you—"

He stopped her, laughing. "No—don't! I didn't show it to you for that—not because it's a mark of distinction. It isn't. That's the beauty of it. Where millions of men are doing the same thing, one isn't distinguished above all the others, except by the accidents of war. But I wanted you to know that I haven't been keeping out of it. I got into it pretty early, and stayed till Verdun. That's where I was hurt. It was just bad enough to keep me from getting back before this. I've been rejected twice, when I've tried. The last time I was told to rough it out of doors for a while, if I wanted to pick up condition. That's why I'm here. And that's all. I don't want you to make too much of it; but I wanted you to know."

She did not try to speak in comment, but he felt his cheeks flushing under her intent scrutiny. Lightly he turned the talk away from that ground.

"It's what I've seen of men in these years," he said, "that makes me less doubtful than I might be of these hill people. I've seen all sorts of men gathered from all sorts of places and turned into great soldiers. It's not safe to condemn any man till he's been given his chance. I'll never judge any man on appearances till I see him under the real test. I've learned that."

He took his cross from her hand and returned it to his pocket.

"Tell me what it was you did," she asked.

"I can't," he said. "I don't remember. It was in the air. The wild man that's in me sometimes took a wild chance and got a wild fall, but the man I was after got a harder one. The French enjoyed it. They're not like other people. They don't become surfeited. I think they'll be disappointed if the war doesn't develop some sort of a dramatic finish. I hope they get it; it's due them. They're entitled to anything they want to ask for."

He went away then, without more words, when Ordway came from the house to join his daughter.

CHAPTER XIII

NOTWITHSTANDING Farnsworth's declaration of faith, the Cove people were not to be of one mind concerning their part in war. Rumor

said that many of the drafted men had failed to obey their call, and the names of the rebels made it appear a clan affair, with old Jim Braden in defiant leadership. There was only difficult conjecture as to the outcome; for the voice of authority was slow in speaking, the hand of authority patiently withheld. Presently Government would see what it could do about the matter; meanwhile the chieftain of the Bradens, keeping close to cover, spoke his challenge. Experience had made old Jim just a bit doubtful of Government's supreme majesty and power. Government had said long ago that whisky-making at the moonshine stills must stop. Well, it hadn't stopped. There were places in the hill fastnesses, after all, where he who thirsted perseveringly might attain thirst's end. Inconvenient—yes; but that was not the point. Government was not omnipotent.

About the mill-camp there was little time for considering the vagaries of the draft-resisters. Work crowded, and it was work which had engaged the hearty interest of every man in the crew. Never before had Ordway seen this corps spirit in his service. The men understood to what end they were working. Farnsworth had taken care, in making up the crew, that the workers were those who for one reason or another would not see active war-service. Somehow he and Phelan had brought the others to appreciate that this might be the next-best chance for proof of loyalty; they were taking pride in it. Things were going well; already the new pine was moving from the mill-yard to the railway for loading out. Ordway was mightily pleased.

He spoke his satisfaction one evening after an especially good day, when he sat beneath the trees with some of the men, resting, planning better detail for the days ahead.

"I feel as if I owe you men a lot besides wages," he said to Phelan. "It takes something besides my style of headwork to make a job go. I've been flattering myself too long that I'm a superior sort of person, just because I can think of things as I'd like to have them. There's nothing much in that. I'm learning modesty. There's a lot of difference between wanting something to happen and making it happen."

Phelan took that very literally.

"So there is! It's better so. If every wan of us, now, could have things just

like he wants 'em for himself, without havin' to get anybody to help him bring 'em round, it would be a right queer world—every which way, it would be. It's teamwork that keeps us from that, don't ye see? It's teamwork that's going to set all straight. We get a chance to balance each other that way. Teamwork by men, an' teamwork by nations. That's what I'm wantin' to see. An' I'm seein' more an' more of it, every year I live."

THE talk grew genial and ranged far while the summer dusk fell. Night was almost upon them when Jerome Hamilton came by, bound up the mountain from the valley, driving a loaded wagon. He let his beasts rest for a time and called from the trail:

"I'm getting ready for my commissary. I think you told me the truth, Mr. Ordway. I've been looking for the fun in getting this thing started. This is no joke. Two hundred dollars on this load, and I've been all day going in and getting back with it."

Phelan sat looking after him as he got his load under way again and moved off into the darkness.

"That man, now—" he said softly. "I'm wan that enjoys makin' up his mind about a man. The enjoyment I'm goin' to get out of him that way is still comin' to me."

"You can't make him out?" Ordway questioned. "Why?"

"If I knew why, that would be the answer," Phelan said. "He's right soft-spoken and gentlemanly, aint he? I like a soft-spoken man, when there's anything to be soft-spoken about. But there's other times—Does anybody know what that man stands for? Has he ever said?"

"Why—" Ordway began; but the definite word would not come readily. "I don't know. He's a farmer—a man with a little money, maybe, trying to get ahead. Isn't that explanation enough?"

"Is it?" Phelan returned. "Most times, maybe. These times, I kind o' like to get a man placed before I start gettin' fond of him."

"Whatever he is, he's going to get his load of stuff wet," Farnsworth interposed. "But it's not a tornado this time."

Darkness had shut down suddenly, and out of the wide spaces a breath of coolness crept softly. Somewhere not far away rain was already falling; the fresh fra-

grance of it was very grateful; the low murmur of it upon the thick leafage of the forest had a note of vastness. The first drops fell heavily. There was no wind; there was no noise of storm, but only the sonorous monotone of the downpour.

All through the night the rain fell steadily. Morning showed a world drenched, saturated; the hillsides were roaring with myriad rivulets in turbid flood; low-banked cloud-masses enveloped the mountain-tops; gray rain blotted out the distances, shut the camp into complete isolation.

Nothing was to be done at the mill or in the woods. Impatient, the men put off work till the afternoon; but afternoon brought no change save an occasional burst of stormy violence, throbbing like a huge, intermittent pulse through the unceasing deluge. The swift rivulets were torrents.

In mid-afternoon Farnsworth put on storm clothing and went out, going toward the river. On the bottom lands the woodsmen had felled some heavy pine in the last week, wonderful trees, and the logs were in lengths in the woods ready for hauling. Farnsworth said he wanted to see whether any of this stuff lay in danger from flood, for another night of such rain must bring the river out of its banks.

HE found the stream already bank-full, turbulent, rising swiftly under the feeding of a hundred freshets from the Cove's watershed. If the rain held on, undoubtedly there would be work for tomorrow, here on the lowlands. Logging would be impossible; but the best of the felled timber might be anchored in some fashion to the standing trees and saved from loss.

He did not linger upon the flats, but returned toward camp by way of the cave entrance. There he turned aside and went into the first chamber, lighting his way with an electric torch.

This chamber was not large. It was floored with an ancient ash-bed, token of unknown centuries of occupation, packed hard by time. At the rear the roof shelved sharply down; but beyond a narrow passage yawned, leading into blackness. Farnsworth had to stoop, stumbling over rough masses of rock dislodged from above, but after a rod or two this obstacle was passed. There the floor was smooth, soft to his feet. The passage was walled like a hall, easy to follow; it appeared as a fissure

river through the mountain in some old cataclysm of earthquake, and flooded through ages of the rocks' decay. Here there was no confusion of interlacing avenues to lead him astray.

He looked carefully for footprints in the yielding ground. There they were. In the center of the passage they made a beaten path; at the sides he could distinguish them singly. It was plain enough that this way had been traveled often. He had lost the stream that issued at the cave's mouth; no doubt it had its channel hidden in the fissure underfoot; in the recesses ahead he could hear the murmur of water.

Three hundred yards on, over an ascending way, the passage opened upon a second chamber many times larger than the first, vaulted. The torch revealed its roof only dimly. Here too the floor was much trampled. Farnsworth found the explanation at once. Against one wall, thrown down in a mass of broken earthenware and crumbled odds and ends, lay a battered and twisted still-work, relic of the moonshiners. The days of use seemed long gone; rust and decay had been ruthlessly at work. Nowhere was there any sign that this chamber had served any purpose recently. Farnsworth searched till he had found an exit to other depths. And here too were footprints, not so many, but easily to be followed.

He went on more slowly, for the way grew much steeper. The passage broadened; at two or three places it branched, sending out straggling arms. He would have been at a loss save that only one of the ways showed the marks of feet. He kept to that, following steadily, making sure that he might not be misled upon his return.

For an hour he climbed. Always the way was plain. And then again he heard the sound of living water. The note was insistent now; as he advanced it gained in volume, steadied into one deep, unvarying tone. That was not a stream, he knew, but a fall. He came upon it suddenly in another of those wide chambers.

A sense of awe possessed him as the focused beam of his torch picked out the details of that deep-buried scene. Here was mystery. Over the lip of a rock-ledge a hundred feet above, the waters burst in majestic volume, falling sheer. But they were not stayed at the level of the chamber's floor. Farnsworth drew nearer, lighting his way step by step, till

he stood at the edge of a chasm of impenetrable depth. Into that void the white cataract plunged and was lost. He lay upon his breast and followed the shining line with his light-beam; but the depth made mock of the effort. Far down, the waters dissolved into dim gray, into black, into nothingness. He listened intently, but the throb of his own pulse in his ears drowned any sound from the abyss to betray that the waters had broken their fall.

It was a little time before he could be free of the fascination of the spectacle. He found his path then and went on.

Not far! A sound stopped him; he stood still, switching off his light. A little way ahead, suddenly the darkness was broken into gray light, a glimpse of the light of day. He knew what it meant; knew that he was facing the rude stairway leading out of Hamilton's storeroom on the mountain-top. There was the square opening in the wall made by removal of the sliding planks; and there Hamilton himself appeared, crawling through, standing on the topmost step, lifting a burden in after him, carrying it down the stairway into the cave. He returned again and again, bearing bags and boxes.

Farnsworth watched till the man's task was finished and he was gone, with the planks set back in place. Farnsworth swore softly and turned to retrace his way.

CHAPTER XIV

THE lowlands were flooded before another dawn. All night, through his restless sleep, Farnsworth heard the deep-toned, unrelenting roar of the falling rain; it obsessed his uneasy dreams. There was no break when morning came, nor any rising of the wind to promise change. Through the first night and day the heavy forest cover had checked the flow of the waters upon the hills; but now the forest was saturated, and every slope was a sheet of rushing flood. No longer was the water confined to channels.

Before breakfast, in the first half-light, Farnsworth went down the path to the mill-site. At the hill's foot, before he got to the log-yard, there was a dip of low ground a hundred yards across. Already this swale was brimming full; when he waded across, the water was about his waist. This was not merely a flood-filled pond; he felt the tug of a sluggish current,

saw that the surface bore a mass of drift moving out toward the river. The river's channel was a quarter of a mile distant; yet now the flood spread out over the full width of the plain. The piling of the mill-building and of the long tramway was hidden for half its height; water stood four or five feet deep at the lumber-stacks; some of the stacks, only partly built up on the last day of work, were toppling; two or three were gone. No doubt the felled logs in the lowland woods were swept away by this time; at any rate, to-day's labor must be in trying to save the cut lumber at the mill. Farnsworth hurried back to camp to summon the crew for this task.

The work was cruelly hard, all the harder because means must be improvised. The lumber could not be moved; to reduce the height of the stacks was to endanger setting them afloat; weight must be added atop somehow. Working in water to their breasts, and steadily rising, the men floated logs from the log-yard as they could, and with rude tackle hoisted and piled them upon the stacks. With ropes and log-chains they made any anchorage that offered along the tramway piling. Long before midday their struggling bodies were near exhaustion, but they were in no mind for surrender.

Presently Tom Phelan dragged his big body up over the framework of the tramway and sank dripping upon the edge of the platform. His hat was lost; his shirt was torn half away; water sluiced from his clothing in runlets. He was too tired to laugh, but his humor was unconquerable.

"This is what you might call an aquatic sport—aint it, now?" he said to Ordway, laboring near by. "Aquatic! That's a real wet-soundin' word, somehow. No dry man made it. The man that made that word was web-footed. My soul! It's rainin' harder! I didn't think it could. An' no place to go! It's come up the full of a foot since ten o'clock. There'll be no lettin' up on this job this day."

AFTER a time ravenous hunger overcame them. One of the boys was sent to the camp-house for food. His errand revealed the flood's increasing menace. In the space between the log-yard and the higher ground, where the men had easily waded a few hours before, he was forced to swim, fighting hard against a swift-rushing current. If any of those at the mill were not good swimmers, he said, they must

stay where they were till the water went down, or take a dangerous chance in getting out. He had done all he could in bringing his light pack across the swollen channel.

The men gathered beneath the saw-shed and ate. Ann had made shift to have the food reach them dry, and there was hot coffee in tight cans. It was comforting. When he had finished, Phelan chuckled.

"Well, there! Do ye feel better, Tom Phelan? Yes, I do—thank ye for inquirin'. If I had a smoke— But I haven't. So I'll just get along without. If I had a wee bit of whisky— But I haven't. So I'll just let it go. That's what I like about you, Tom Phelan—you're so adaptable. Takin' things just the way they come—it's a good way. I've found out that the man that takes things the way they come, he's the wan that gets the most, even if he does have to get along without. Do ye see what I mean, now?"

One of the boys stretched his aching muscles, eying the philosopher doubtfully.

"Could you get along without this rain?" he questioned mildly.

"I could not!" Phelan retorted. "That's what I'm tellin' you. I could not—because it's rainin'. The thing to do now is to behave as if we thought it wasn't goin' to stop. Come on, now!"

CHAPTER XV

SHUT in through the morning at the camp-house, Ann Hickman was restless, silent, uncompanionable. Her duties were not enough to engage her completely; the rain oppressed her. Often she would go to stand upon the wide porch, staring off into the heavy pall of gray that inclosed the camp. Of late days Kate had fancied that the girl's old reserve was breaking down a little under acquaintance; there had been times when Ann had frankly invited talk, seeming to find pleasure in it. But to-day that was not her temper; she did not want to talk. This was not sullenness, but only a drawing apart. Kate respected it, allowed the girl to have her way. Kate read a little, stitched a little, dreamed a little; she was far from depression of spirit.

When Ann had prepared food for the men at noon, she made ready for walking.

"I can't stand this," she said. "I'm goin' out awhile."

She was gone till mid-afternoon, but the walk had not abated her moodiness. Kate saw that she was pale, wide-eyed, nervous, her thoughts afar off.

Toward evening the messenger came again from the mill for supper for the men. The story he told was disquieting. The workers were chilled, weary, but there were several who must stay where they were because of the ever-rising flood. Only in extremity would they try to leave. Somehow blankets must be got to them.

With the boy's help Ann made up a bundle of blankets, inclosing into it with heavy waterproof wagon-sheets, making it tight. There was plenty of small rope in the mill commissary. Ann went with the messenger down the trail, watched while he swam out with a rope's end, watched till the bundle was dragged safely through the tumbling water. Back at the house she made coffee for herself and Kate, keeping silence.

Night came on. Some of the men returned to camp, exhausted. They had done what they could; it was impossible to work in darkness. The rain was less, they said; a fitful wind was rising; that meant, most likely, the breaking-up of the storm. At any rate they could do no more till morning. Wearily they went to their beds.

By and by Kate too went to her room. Sleep was slow in coming. For a long time she lay listening to the beating of the rain upon the low roof. It was coming gustily now; the intervals grew longer, with moments of breathless hush.

SHE roused from half-sleep to find Ann standing beside her bed with a lamp.

"You'll have to get up," Ann said steadily. "You'll have to help me. We've got to get word to your father. The mill—It's goin' to be blown up to-night, if we don't do somethin' to stop it."

Kate's every sense leaped to alertness.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, Ann! The mill—How do you know? Are you sure?"

"It was to be about two o'clock," Ann said. "It's twelve now."

"But how do you know?" Kate insisted. "Tell me what you do know. Tell me!"

Ann's hand sought her throat; her voice was choked, uncertain.

"I've known it since afternoon," she said. "I can't—I can't tell you how. You mustn't ask me to tell. It aint too late yet."

Kate was dressing hurriedly. "The

men—some of them are here. One of them can cross. Have you waked them?"

"No—no!" Ann said. "I can't tell anybody but you. If you knew—I didn't know what to do. We've got to think of some way that won't let anybody know I told, only you. You've got to promise."

"I'll go!" Kate flashed. "Thank God, that's one thing I can do—I can swim. Find me something I may put on for swimming—anything—quick!"

She made ready with all haste, and together they descended the path to the water's edge. There Kate's heart misgave her. She did not doubt her skill as a swimmer; she had proved that often enough, in other ways than this; but something more than skill was needed now. The task before her demanded sheer unquestioning courage, a supreme command over fear. Only for a little way out was the face of the swirling water visible; beyond that was deep blackness. Rising wind and dark, scudding cloud-masses gave a sense of wild unreality. Kate hesitated for a moment, summoning her will, compelling herself to understand that this was a life-and-death errand. Ann spoke dully:

"You'll have to watch out for drift, through this deepest part. There was a lot of it this evenin'. But the water's quieter after you get across this part. You'll tell 'em—tell 'em there'll be a boat come up from down below. That's what they've got to look out for. If you don't make it—"

"I'll make it," Kate said, and stepped resolutely down.

NEVER before in Kate's life had she really battled. This was battle. Away from the bank, swept from her feet, before she had found her stroke, she felt a thrill of abject dismay. Ann's caution about the danger from drift had not been vain. That peril was actual; but it was more the undiscovered nameless terrors that loomed largest in her unaccustomed fancy. After the first minute or two in the darkness she had grown hopelessly confused as to directions; there was only the set of the current to guide her. As well as she could, she had tried to keep the black bulks of the hills for landmarks; but that became impossible when she was obliged to watch ceaselessly for the drifting logs and to fight free of their paths.

She could not judge of her progress, but with the passing of the minutes she knew

she was winning ahead. There came to her a thrill of elation in this matching of her strength against the unknown and terrible; but before long that zest began to give way to weariness; she was fighting ahead doggedly, stroke by stroke. She felt profound relief when she knew that she had passed the swift current and entered the quieter water beyond.

For all her skill, she had been borne down below the mill. Floating, resting, recovering herself a little, she made out the form of the shed against the lowering sky. Her work was much easier now. Soon she was swimming slowly past the great lumber-piles toward the shelter of the roof where she knew the men must be.

With her last strength she caught at the edge of the platform, supporting herself, calling. Again and again she called before she was answered—by her father's voice.

"Here, Dad!" she said. "It's Kate. You'll have to help me—quick."

CHAPTER XVI

AT the lower end of the tramway Tom Phelan lay at his length in the darkness, waiting. At intervals up and down the platform and about the shed the other men were disposed like himself, waiting. It was an hour since Kate had brought the alarm. Phelan was beginning to have his doubts, was beginning to tire of his post on the wet planking. Not under the strongest urging had the girl yielded to their demand for more than her bare statement of what impended. Phelan could not make it out. His notions of women were a little vague. After an hour of this discomfort, with his aching body crying for rest and sleep, he was quite willing to believe that it was all a foolish vagary.

He changed his mind sharply. Out there on the dark water, only a little distance off, he caught the dip of oars and a low-spoken word. He stiffened, staring. A light spit of rain fell, spattering upon the planks, making a soft chuckling sound upon the flood. Then again, unmistakably, the oar-dip sounded, nearer, nearer. At ten or a dozen yards he could see the form of the boat, a broad-bottomed river skiff carrying two men. It came on as if its passengers were unaware that the crew had remained at the mill overnight; they were taking no extra precautions for silence.

Phelan was unarmed; so were the others. No plan had been made for meeting the marauders if they came; that must depend upon what happened. They would be overpowered and taken if possible, or frightened off in emergency. Phelan lay quiet, alert, as the boat drifted under the oarsman's last stroke and the oars were taken in; six or eight feet more, and it would touch the end of the platform.

And then Phelan paid the price of that last hour outstretched in his wet clothes, inactive: he sneezed. The paroxysm seized him, mastered him, before he was aware. In the throes of it a wild impulse of perversity flashed into his mind. When he couldn't check the sneeze, he let it go with all the vehemence his deep lungs could put into it; and on the instant his big hand grasped the boat's prow and held on. Startled, crying out in inarticulate alarm, the oarsman flung himself headlong into the water; the other followed. Phelan shouted, and the men of the crew came running; but the visitors were gone, swimming hard.

Phelan lay as he was, shaken with mighty laughter. The comedy of the matter overwhelmed him.

"It was a good sneeze—wasn't it, now?" he cried. "I come of a family that sneezes real hearty—an' I did them proud! Didn't I, now? Could ye beat it for a sneeze? But they didn't know what it was. They wasn't expectin' anything like that—was they? No, they was not! You could tell that. They didn't even try to take the boat along. A boat would be too slow. An' they'll not be comin' after it."

He rocked with huge mirth. Then, as an afterthought, he swung the boat around broadside against the piling.

"Let's see what they brought along. My soul, it's here! The little girl was tellin' the truth. Look."

He hauled up and laid upon the planks a dozen sticks of high-power dynamite, fuse, a box of detonators, some odds and ends of tools, examining them with grim concentration. His mirth was gone.

THERE was an evening of perfect calm. The sunset sky was not aflame with flamboyant gauds of beauty, but melting soft with infinite subtleness. The cleansing of the rain had left the warm air jewel-clear, poignantly sweet in its rich blending of wild odors; the hues of the forest greenery were unblemished.

Kate Ordway sat alone in her loved place beneath the trees, eyes and heart and mind brooding upon the wonder of this wilderness spot. She was not consciously thinking; complete abandonment to enjoyment sufficed. At the farther end of the camp-house the men of the mill crew were grouped, lounging, smoking, laughing easily over a lively exchange of words between Farnsworth and Tom Phelan. Kate was not attending to what they said; but the note of the robust gayety reached her, comforted her.

By and by she saw Farnsworth leave the group and come toward her, smiling. He sat at her side; for a little time he did not speak, nor did she. When his first words came, they were curiously matched to her mood.

"It's wonderful! To look at it, you'd think nothing but this had ever happened here. It's a trick the outdoors knows. Tragedy hangs on under the roofs; somehow you keep dwelling on it after it's past. But out of doors it's not like that. You've seen! When a storm is past, it's past, and the world seems perfectly ready for the next thing that's coming. I like it."

Kate's answer was unspoken; the light in her clear eyes deepened; her body stirred a little. Her color mounted as Farnsworth looked at her steadily. What she saw in his eyes was intimate beyond words; but what he said was impersonal enough.

"I suppose the secret of it is that the big outdoors doesn't know how to hold grudges. It doesn't seem to have any memory for what's gone wrong; it doesn't bother itself with anything but the business of setting things right. It's we humans who have complicated the game by remembering. If we might learn to remember only what's worth while, and let the rest go! To remember the good that men have tried to do, instead of holding their blunders against them—is that a ridiculous scheme?"

SHE shook her head; she took the chance he gave for making the tone of the argument light-tempered.

"No, not altogether ridiculous. Everything that's human must have something ridiculous about it—mustn't it? How would you have it? A separate place in your mind where you might send the things you want to forget? What would

be the first thing you'd try to forget if you could?"

"I can't remember," he laughed. His mood changed swiftly; he was regarding her again intently, gravely. "I know something I couldn't forget if I would—these days here. They've been wonderful."

"These days here?" she rallied. "Wonderful? After all of what you've seen and done?"

"After all of what I've seen and done," he returned. "That's been adventuring—just trying to find out what it's all about. I wasn't sure whether I'd ever discover the answer. Oh, I've had a lot out of life! A man may see and feel a lot, living just as I have, even if his life has nothing but length and breadth. But the third dimension—finding the third dimension of life is the end worth while. Discovering that it does mean something—that it may mean something for oneself besides what appears on the surface."

The simple saying gave her agitation beyond anything his words carried. She did not attempt answering; she could not. And then, oddly, the need for answering was taken away.

A ramshackle old carriage turned a bend in the trail below the camp, crawling into view, bumping over the stones, coming from the town in the valley. The driver turned into the camp-yard, and his passenger got down, shaking himself, glancing round, then coming straight to the seat beneath the trees. He was an oldish man, turning gray, blunt of figure, blunt-mannered, blunt-spoken.

"I'm looking for Major Farnsworth," he said.

Farnsworth stood erect. "Yes! You are Mr. Wharton? I've been expecting you."

CHAPTER XVII

AT breakfast, Wharton made no secret of his errand. Government was beginning to pay attention to the problem of dealing with the draft-resisters here in the hills. On the whole, it was a moderate sort of program. Government would give the men a little margin—just enough to make sure that the imperative order was borne to them; after that there would be no least hair's-breadth of indulgence. He who resisted with understanding would be hunted down relentlessly.

"It's rather a delicate job," Wharton said, "—making citizens into soldiers. A century of free speech and do-as-you-please, and all that—Some men like these fellows need to have the kinks taken out of their thinking. That's what I'm here for. Major Farnsworth, here, has volunteered to help. It's ticklish work, now and then. I may have to trespass upon you for a few days, while we're about it."

Farnsworth was silent. So was Ordway. If the identity of this wayfarer had puzzled him, he was still more perturbed, now that the puzzle was solved. He had conceived a sturdy liking for the man, had learned to consider him invaluable in his work; and now he knew that the relation must end soon.

The two women also were quiet, each in her own way, each with her own motives. Ann Hickman, serving, effaced herself completely. None knew that she hung passionately upon every syllable. That was disclosed only to Kate, when breakfast was done and the men were gone to their work. No word was spoken for a time, as they attended to their tasks in the dining-room. It was Ann who broke the silence.

"You've been fair with me," she said suddenly. "You've been fairer than I've been with you. I haven't told you all, times when I've talked to you. I've been keepin' something back. You knew I was. You didn't try to make me tell all, the way some would. You didn't know for sure you could trust me; but you acted towards me as if you was sure."

There was no revelation in the slow speech. Kate wondered.

"Why, Ann—of course I've trusted you."

"I aint goin' to tell you all now," Ann said. "I can't. I don't need to, not if you can keep on trustin' me. If I did, it don't seem as if it would be—fair to—to other people. You don't know about that. This aint the way you've lived. You haven't got any way of tellin' what it's like to have lived this way always—just a few people, with nobody but themselves to think about. They aint to blame because they don't know much else. I don't blame these boys for thinkin' about hidin' out. They don't know. But—but—"

SHE found difficulty there; the effort she made to overcome it was very obvious, painful. There was the constraint of native reticence and something besides to embarrass her.

"Love!" she said breathlessly. "A woman—the only kind of woman I know about—it comes natural for her to think love's the first thing there is. These women here—if they love anybody, it don't seem to matter about the rest. Do you reckon that's right?"

Now that the question was asked, it was simple enough. Swiftly Kate's understanding swept her to conclusions. There was no need that Ann should go further, no need that Kate should hesitate. She spoke with a kindred simplicity, not in argument, but in declaration of a perfect faith.

"No, Ann, that's not right. There must be something besides. Love with honor—that's it. I don't believe there is such a thing as real love without honor, because without it there couldn't be any trust. Do you know what I mean?"

"Trust!" Ann echoed. As if in sharp pain, she made the gesture of setting her hand to her throat; her eyes were like those of a hurt animal. "Trust! Yes, I reckon there's got to be trust too, or else—or else it wouldn't last. Trust! I reckon that's the biggest part of it. It's sure the hardest part."

She said no more, but turned to her work for a time, brooding. Kate did not question.

Farnsworth came to the door then, standing upon the threshold, glancing from one to the other.

"I was intending to speak with Miss Ann," he said. "Maybe it's better that both of you hear. This man Wharton—you know why he is here. We hope there will be no trouble. Anyone who tries to make trouble will make a mistake. The Government is making a specialty of dealing with trouble-makers in these days. Miss Ann, the man who calls himself Hamilton is a scoundrel. He's worse than a common scoundrel; he's a traitor to his country. I think you ought to understand that the man who is willing to betray his country for pay in a time like this wouldn't hesitate to betray a woman. You've known something about what he's been doing and trying to do, but I think you've been deceived. I think you're too good a woman to share with anybody in a piece of treachery if you hadn't been deceived. I've figured you out, you see. Anyway, I'd like to tell you that it's better for you not to have anything more to do with him. It wouldn't do any good, and it might be serious for you. You won't—will you?"

He left them abruptly with that. Ann stood motionless, white, stricken.

CHAPTER XVIII

FARNSWORTH and Wharton spent two fruitless days in the down-river country. Their errand was pacific, but they found no opportunity for making that understood. The down-river country was singularly empty of men. The rude little cabins held women enough; children rather more than enough; men just none at all. Nor would the solemn-visaged women attempt to be explicit as to the whereabouts of their men-folks. They weren't at home; they were out in the timber somewheres, prob'ly; they might be gone a considerable while, likely.

By the end of the second day Wharton was frankly out of temper. There wasn't enough of the humorist in Wharton.

"Major," he said, "I don't like to be made a fool of. These closemouthed women—If you'd let me take my way, I'd make 'em tell us something."

Farnsworth was taking the adventure in better part. He laughed at Wharton's irritated discomfiture.

Evening was gathering when they gained the summit of Gray Fox Mountain. Hamilton was in his dooryard, cutting wood. He rested upon his ax, greeting his visitors quietly.

"You're in good time. I'm just starting my supper-fire."

Farnsworth took it upon himself to answer.

"We can't stop. This is our busy day. We're hunting the chaps who are trying to dodge the draft."

"Not guilty!" Hamilton smiled. "I'm thirty-four. Can't you wait for a cup of coffee?"

"We'd better not wait for anything," Farnsworth said. "We'd better get straight to the point. We want you to take us to where those men are hiding."

"I?" Hamilton questioned. He was unperturbed.

"Drop it!" Farnsworth ordered. "Drop your ax too, and hold out your hands."

He was handcuffed. Farnsworth took his arm and led him to the storeroom under the cliff, then moved aside the planking concealing the cave entrance.

"Now, listen!" he said. "What you get out of this for yourself will depend some-

what upon how you behave yourself underground. There's to be no foolishness. You have nothing at all to do but to lead the way. Go ahead!"

THEY descended in silence to the chamber of the waterfall. In the passage Farnsworth ordered Hamilton to signal his coming as if he were alone. He went on at Hamilton's back, leaving Wharton to follow.

At the side of the chamber across from the cataract a wood-fire was burning. On the ground about the fire half a dozen men lay sleeping; others squatted about indolently, smoking, drowsing. One of the sleepers was Jim Braden. At hand were stores of food, blankets and a supply of firewood. There was no hardship in this hiding.

One of the men who sat by the fire glanced up when Hamilton entered, then started to his feet in sudden alarm. There was quick movement in the group. Jim Braden awoke, blinking, staring, sprang erect, his hand groping at his hip. His disordered mind, startled, misjudged what he saw. His conclusion was swift. Betrayal was all he thought of, and he took no second thought. In passionate anger he swore horribly, fired once, turned and ran, looking over his shoulder in panic.

Farnsworth let Hamilton's sagging body down upon the ground and moved to follow Braden, but too late. Between fear and the grotesque trickery of the firelight. Braden had misjudged again. At the edge of the pit he tried to catch himself, blundered, clutched at nothing and went down, screaming. In the depths and in the far recesses of the cave, echoes seized upon the cry, played with it, mocked at it, let it fall into silence. No man stirred but Hamilton, sitting bent over, spitting out blood and some broken splinters of his teeth. Braden's bullet had cut through both cheeks.

Farnsworth spoke.

"Listen to me, you men! This is more than we dreamed of. We didn't come for anything like this. Maybe it's just as well. That man could never have understood. He didn't belong to this time. You do. This is your time and your chance. You'd better take the chance. I'm telling you that as your friend. You're not under arrest. You may stay here in the dark if

you like and take chances with the dark; but you'd better come out where it's light."

He stooped, caught Hamilton's arm and raised him to his feet, and with Wharton started down the cave trail toward the lower mouth. A voice called after them:

"Wait! We-all are comin'. Wait till we can light some fat-wood."

CHAPTER XIX

THERE came another evening of perfection, of exquisite glory. This time it was Ordway and Tom Phelan who had the seat under the giant oak before the camp-house. They weren't paying much attention to sunset tintings and subtleties. Neither were Kate and Farnsworth, loitering just within sight down the Gray Fox Trail.

"Phelan," Ordway said bluntly, "there's a man I hate to lose."

"Which man?" Phelan questioned. "Oh—that wan!" His glance dwelt upon the pair shrewdly, and he chuckled. "That wan! Ye hate to lose him, ye say? What makes ye talk about losin' him, now?"

"He's going away," Ordway said. "This is his last week here."

Phelan took another look; but instead of chuckling, he sighed.

"Aye-aye! Losin' him—just because he's goin' away! My wor-rd, ye'll never lose that man. He'll be comin' back, or I'm no judge. He'll be comin' back, if it was from the end of the world. Yes, he will. The young an' the old! Did it ever occur to ye to wonder which has the best of it? Is it the young wans, do ye think, with everything ahead of them yet; or is it folks like you an' me, that's been through it an' kept the faith an' found out that it's all true an' worth livin' for? Which is the best, now? I'll tell ye: it's neither the wan nor the other; it's both together. It's the young an' the old together. It's the courage of the young an' the strength of the old, together. It's all of us—all that we are an' all we dream of bein', young and old, all together. Don't ye think we're workin' a bit closer to that, these times? An' wont that make it all better worth while?"

"Yes, please God!" Ordway said fervently.

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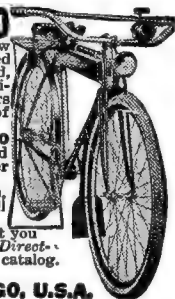
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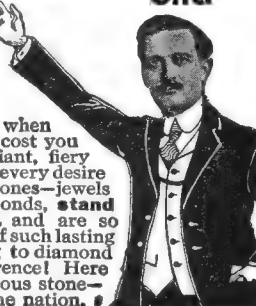
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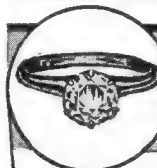
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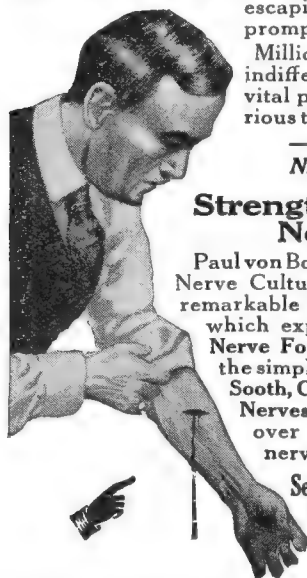
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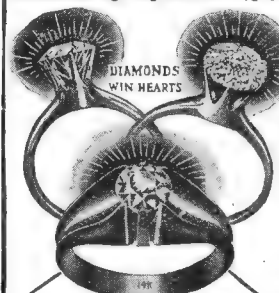
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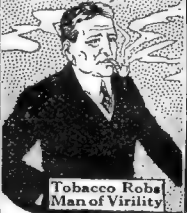
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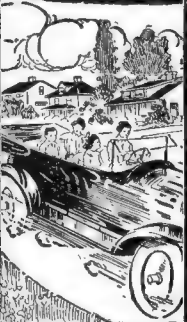
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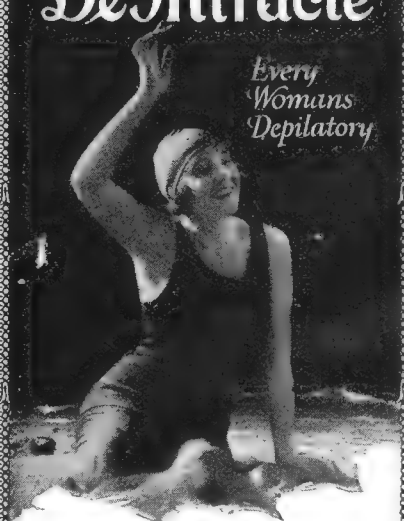
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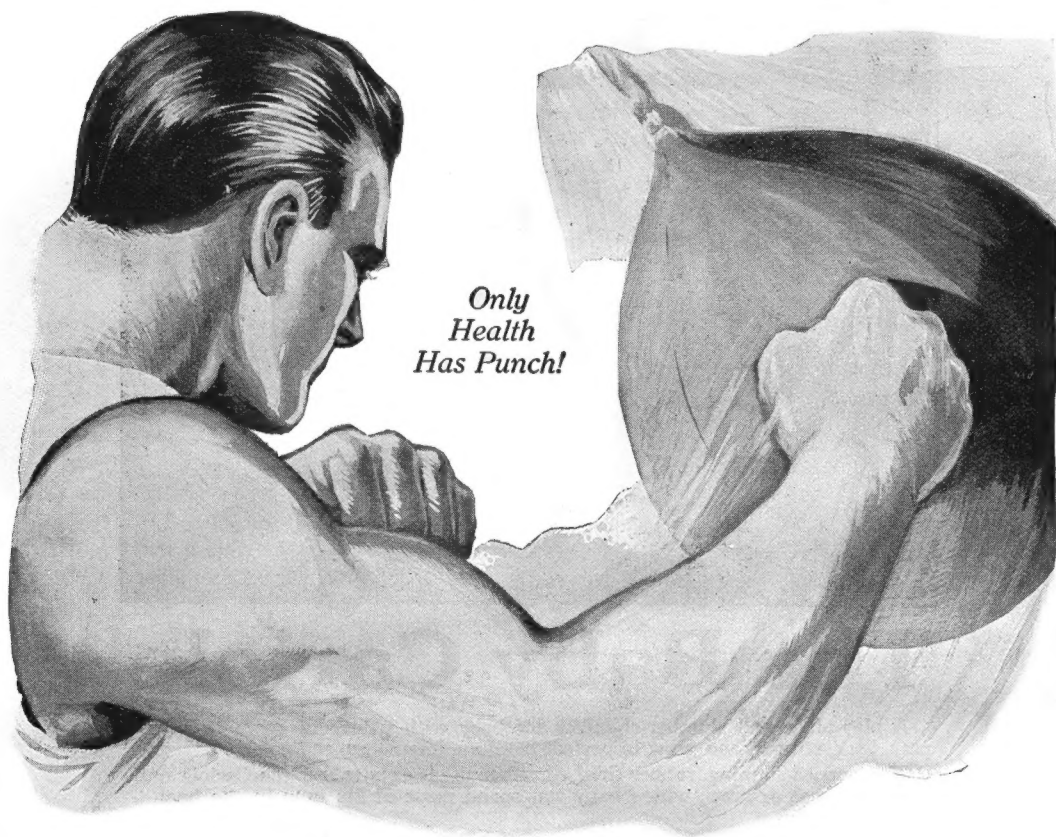
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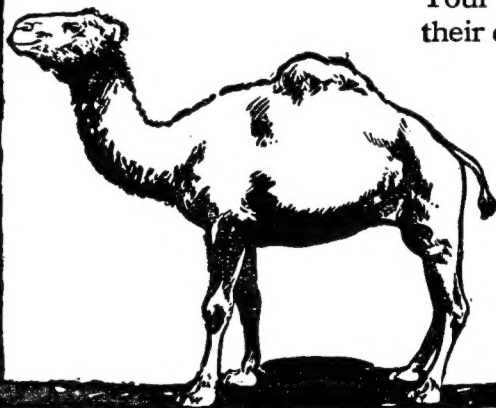
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